LAND'S END

WHEN THEY WALKED HOME, IT WAS BETWEEN TWO LINES OF PEOPLE

Land's End

AND OTHER STORIES

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BY

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE
Author of "STORM"

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LAND'S END

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eele, Wilbur Daniel. Land's end, and other stories. N.Y. Harper, 1918. 304p. $1.35.

Very pictorial stories thrilling with the atmosphere of the omnipresent as it shapes the ordinary details of the lives of the Cape Cod fisherman. Some have appeared in *Harper's Magazine*.

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To
Margaret Thurston Steele

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN "A White Horse Winter" was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1912 it was at once realized by discriminating readers that a new talent of great promise had appeared in American short-story literature. In the six years which have followed the publication of this story, Wilbur Daniel Steele has pursued a course of uncompromising fidelity to his literary ideals, publishing comparatively few stories, but maintaining a standard of imaginative reality which has slowly, but surely, deepened in an art which bears all the signs of permanence.

If I were asked to indicate the single quality by which Mr. Steele's stories rightly claim their place in our literature, I should say that it was by virtue of his sensitive fidelity to the more abiding romance of ordinary life. While it is true that his pictorial sense of atmospheric values serves to define the terms on which he is willing to render human character in conflict, the essential merit of his findings is due to the impartial view which he takes of circumstance, an impartiality as unconscious and as real as that of a

child before daily happenings. It is, perhaps, this very joy in apprehending spiritual values without self-consciousness, as a child apprehends them, which has led him to set down what he has seen most often in the words of a boy, to whom wonder reveals more of the truth than self-analysis, and to whom delight in a story is a sufficient preoccupation, without premature analysis of his own human relation to what he sees.

Mr. Steele's pictorial sense is somewhat akin to that of Fromentin in *Dominique*, though less hard by virtue of his sense of wonder. The stories collected in this volume have, in fact, a quality of romantic escape rare in our American life, and so correspondingly rare in our American literature. Landscape, with its human foreground, gives Mr. Steele a sense of liberation, so that it is a refuge for him from the impact of facts, so falsely called reality by most men. He is, therefore, a romantic realist, who refuses to escape from life, but contents himself by making a truce with it. If his stories reveal a certain nostalgia, it is a personal nostalgia, and it does not color his interpretation of life. You feel that his quarrel is with the matter-of-fact rather than with civilization.

In this respect he is to be contrasted with Synge, though there is much resemblance in other ways between the two writers. To Synge, the Aran Islands were a refuge from civilization,

and his art was almost a protective coloration against life. In our crowded mercantile civilization, Mr. Steele must have been tempted frequently to a similar reaction, and, like Synge, he, too, might have found what he sought in a more primitive and brutal life, with its franker valuation of motive and relationship. But instead of seeking for an American Aran, he has found the relief of self-expression in a curious and searching simplification of life, which he has set against a more familiar background.

Behind the complications which his men and women weave for one another looms the eternal but ever-changing pattern of the sea. The passionate heart of the waters pulses in all these tales, never forgotten yet never fully realized, an inscrutable mystery with all the blind and irresistible power of destiny molding lives to an unseen end.

It is as if men and women were unmindful of all life not directed to the sea's ends, and as if they fulfilled these ends inevitably, and often against their dearest desires. Here is their romantic escape and at the same time their greatest spiritual fulfilment.

Mr. Steele's apprehension of human life in its relation to natural forces is from a different angle than that of Joseph Conrad. The latter sets man against an eternal background remote from common experience, and reveals him translated from his fellows by the simplification of space

and time experienced by those who follow the sea. Mr. Steele's preoccupation is with a more generally shared background, in which wonder is born of ordinary things, whose strangeness has been forgotten through constant surface familiarity. He finds as much drama in the dory life of Portuguese fishermen on Cape Cod as Conrad has found in the southern seas, and as much detachment from circumstance, save in so far as it is transformed by insight into a new world of strange, forgotten things.

His men and women part for a day only to find the world changed upon their return. But the drama of a day arises naturally out of a long past of slowly accumulating experience, and this background of a suddenly recalled past is most often the moving force of his situation.

Few writers show such economy in the use of their material. You feel that all of Mr. Steele's stories develop from a single picture intensely realized by the artist, and that it is his spirit of inquiry brooding over the implications of this picture which has eventually constituted his story. He is a master of color, and in a few careful strokes presents the same natural background for the passion of his characters that many novelists require several chapters to reveal.

Most of his stories are really fifth acts, in which the drama's previous development is revealed by suggestion. It is the crisis in every human relation which interests him most, but his

implicit realization of what has gone before inevitably suggests that his finer success in fiction will be won as a novelist.

His first novel, *Storm*, had all the fine qualities of his short stories, but its episodic character suggested that it was a prelude to short-story writing rather than the deliberately wrought craftsmanship of a novelist. In the past few years Mr. Steele's technique has tended more and more toward that of a novelist, particularly in his stories of Urkey Island, in which his canvas is larger and more detailed in its realization of a New England community.

It is always hazardous to prophesy the future course of an admirable writer, but it is safe to say that the rich, human embodiment of the stories collected in this volume assure them a permanence in our literature for their imaginative reality, their warm color, and their finality of artistic execution. Almost without exception they represent the best that is being accomplished in America to-day by a literary artist. But Mr. Steele will never be elected to an Academy. Such is the fate of all pioneers.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

STE.-ANNE-DES-MONTS, P. Q.,
July 8, 1918.

LAND'S END

LAND'S END

THE year was dying; day was dying; there was a tale that the woman in the house on the last hill was dying: the wind alone was making. It came in from the sea, and like the sea it knew nothing of life or death. It seemed remote; one heard it high up there in the air, a continuous voice across the heavens. Papers tumbled in the cobbled runways of Barnham Head Village; outriders of the wind flattened the skirts of heavy fishwives, made ribbons of the supper smoke from the thirty chimneys, and rattled the little panes that flared crimson with the sunset across the marshes. Now and then the house on the last hill, careening under the volleys, settled microscopically to the northeast, as it had been settling a hundred years, and the sand spattering across the polished clapboards made a sound within like a newspaper crumpled in the hand.

It seemed fitting that this should be the last house in the world. There was about the hollow thing something so wasted and blighted, and yet unconquerable, like an enduring disaster.

There was a long, loose-boarded porch with pillars across the front of the house and above it a second porch open to the sky, serving the "plastered tenement" advertised on a sign-board flapping beside the gate. Summer visitors sometimes took the plastered tenement—the families of small tradesmen in towns at the head of the cape: people too poor to go elsewhere. They never stayed long, and they never came back another season because they could not bear the tragic beauty of the outlook from that hilltop—the ultimate decay of a continent. The sands were run, even with the door-step; after that the land was no longer like itself, but already half in the grip of ocean. Tide channels webbed the marshes; there were innumerable little pools, clean-rimmed as bath-tubs, deep, clear, filled with tiny, silvery fish; the place was rotten with quicksands. A narrow thread of breakwater stretching across it seemed like the last, hopeless recourse of the beaten physician: the moribund land roused itself once at the end in a huddle of sand-bars, and then there was nothing but the ocean and a bell.

The woman on the bed in the plastered tenement was looking into the candle flame and listening to the bell: a faint, repeated note borne in the bosom of the wind. She had wanted the candle lit, although a shaft of pale magenta still flowed in through the western window to make a ghost of the wick.

She might be twenty-five years of age, or forty —it would be hard to say now. She was of rather slight figure, to judge by the head and shoulders propped against the pillows and the vague outlines folded into the bedclothes. Looking at her face, one saw only the eyes at first. Large, clear, quick-moving between the low-arched lids, brown almost to golden and yet carrying an illusion of great depth, all the vital aspirations seemed to have come to center there, and the replica of the draughty candle, flickering either orb, seemed at home in them, as if they had been used to flame and wind. Save for a sanguine feather on either cheek-bone, the rest of the face was glass white, the features tooled to a fineness so exquisite that they seemed transparent and almost luminous.

She was talking to herself.

"I've been so happy here with the sun and the stars and the wind and the bell. Sweet bell, so patient, so kind, calling to me, day in, day out! I wonder if the bell knows about me. . . . Mrs. Sparrow, where is the bell?"

Mrs. Sparrow, middle-aged, worn and fleshy, answered from her rocker in a shadowed corner:

"The bell, dearie? Why, it's out to the Head, dearie."

"The Head?"

"Yes. The end—b'yond the marshes, y'know. B'yond ever'thin', dearie."

"Oh! The end! So if I could go out to the

end, then I could see the bell. I wonder, I wonder—"

"Hush, dearie!" Mrs. Sparrow got up, patting out her apron and glancing nervously at the bed from the corners of her eyes. "Now, now! Just be quiet, dearie. There! I hear Mr. Mendal coming up now." She was already busy with her shawl and bonnet, relieved by the footfalls beyond the door, ascending slowly and muffled by the crazy rockings of the house. "I hope y'll feel smarter 'n the mornin'," she cast over her shoulder, exactly as she had cast it each evening for nearly a month, and, avoiding the wistful negative from the bed, stepped out of the room and closed the door behind her.

On the landing she confronted Mr. Mendal.

"She says how her money's all gone," she announced in a worried undertone. "She 'xpected to go a week back, she says."

She would have liked to be an idealist, this Widow Sparrow; she would have loved not to have to think of the money part. Looking at Mr. Mendal now, with his stooping shoulders mammoth in the blown candle-light and his face, brown-bearded, kind and unharried, a sense of hopelessness came over her. Mr. Mendal would never understand.

"I know," she said. "But if you was t' have four to home, an' the oldest too young yet t' fish!" She peered up at him. "'Tain't 's if I

knew the first thin' about 'er—where she come from—if she's got folks or no!"

"Don't you worry about the money, Mother Sparrow." Mendal's voice was rich and quiet. "How does she seem to-night?"

"Oh, dear, 'bout the same. Waitin' to be took. I declare she don't seem t' worrit much, though. She begins t' talk queer, though—talkin' 'bout goin' out t' the Head an' the like. It give me a start t' hear 'er."

"She's been out on the porch?"

"Yes, a while. I carried 'er in 'bout an hour ago. She don't seem t' care much what—"

"Yes, yes. Well, I guess that's all. Good night, Mother Sparrow."

Entering the room, he drew the rocker from its corner and sat down beside the bed, leaning a little forward with his hands hanging between his knees.

"Well," he said, "and how are you to-night?"

"Ah, dear friend, dear friend, you know how I am—this last night."

He stared at his wrists.

"Pshaw! You've said that every night the past week."

"Yes, my time was up almost a week ago. I've stolen a week, Mendal—a week of sweetness."

Her eyes went back to the candles, two of them now, on the wash-stand. Mendal's chin sank farther into his neck, and his beard, square and

brown and thick, covered his chest. Their shadows danced over the bare plaster beyond the bed, huge and without shape. Both seemed to be listening to the wind and the clattering shutters and the bell: both were thinking of what was to come.

The woman began again, her voice low and powerless and yet full of a kind of color.

"It's like a balcony here hung over the edge, beyond noise and hurry and naggings and heartbreaks, little loves, tiny hates; beyond time and space, Mendal: beyond everything but the bell and the end. I—I've been wondering—" She got herself out of that with a visible effort and drew one hand from beneath the bedclothes.

"I wonder if you would hold my hand, Mendal?" she asked, with the queerest white smile twisting her lips. He leaned forward awkwardly and covered the white hand with his own brown one.

"Mendal, I wonder if you know how—how—if you know what you've been to me. I must seem so weird to you down here at the end of things: you've always known everything so well, you people here—your neighbors, your plastered tenement, your marshes, your yesterday, your to-morrow. Dropping out of nowhere as I have, unexplained, nameless even, I must have seemed like a—like—"

"Like an angel!" There was a curious harshness in the man's voice.

"Is that why you've been so good and never asked? I don't see how you could have been so good, Mendal, never once to have tried to pry or peep. It was raining that night. Oh, yes, I can remember how hard it rained. And you were driving along the road in your buggy in the rain, thinking of—what were you thinking of, Mendal?"

"I was thinking how late it was."

"And then what did you say when you saw me in the road ahead, staggering along, drenched and crazy and ready to die?"

"I said, 'My God!'"

"Yes, I remember hearing your voice before I went down—other voices, too. Were there some men with you, Mendal?"

"Yes, some neighbors. They got out and walked."

"And you brought me up here! Why did you bring me up here, Mendal, instead of taking me on into the village?"

"The village is noisy sometimes when the fish come in; the carts on the cobbles, children playing, and all. And you were sick and frightened."

"Frightened! Oh, how terribly frightened, Mendal, at first. But not for a long time now—only peaceful and happy, watching the sunlight drift across the wall, listening to the bell out there at the last end, calling—"

Mendal got up suddenly to trim one of the candles which was guttering. After that he

moved about the chamber, his heavy, square-toed boots clanking on the boards, his fingers twining behind his back, and his shadow skipping monstrously from corner to corner. He stood staring for a moment out of the window that had grown black: then he wheeled around abruptly.

"How would you like a little music to-night for a change?"

The woman started to shake her head, and then, seeing by his face how he wanted it, she smiled and nodded. He left the room, to return after a few minutes carrying a phonograph, a black-enameled horn, and a handful of records.

"You see, we're not so countrified down here at the Head, after all. It's a great comfort; makes things more equal. I can sit down and listen to Caruso or Farnoe sing here as well as your man in New York City can. Now, here's one called the 'Mad Song,' for instance—'Mad Song from "Lucia" ' it is."

It was Farnoe singing there in the shiny horn. The record was old and badly marred in places; and yet, with all that, perhaps that "Rose of the World" had never sung her "Mad Song" against a background like this to-night—against fitful candles in a rocking house, against the stark orchestration of the wind, the distracted sand pelting the clapboards, the voice of the bell, remote and disembodied, like a lost sentinel, telling the breakers. At times the silver thread seemed to go out of the chamber, mount up

through the roof, searching for something not to be found, and then, by and by, come back again to break its heart in play.

The woman, lying cheek in hand, did not once move her eyes from Mendal, who sat hunched on his elbows in a curiously relaxed posture, staring at the upper lip of the horn. The aria came to a close, and the needle whirred on untended in the blank.

"It seems queer to me," he dreamed aloud, "how anybody could make-believe like that about a thing like insanity; make a thing that isn't real so much more real than anything else. I suppose that's what they call being an artist."

"That isn't artistry!" The woman raised herself on an elbow. "That's not make-believe, as you call it. No, no—that was Farnoe herself—inside—something she was searching for, a flame for her to play with. Remember, Mendal, when she sang for that record she had just—just—It was about Terry Kew."

"In the play?"

"In the flesh! It was perilous, singing that, Mendal. No one could have dreamed how perilous but I. I could—because—I am Mary Farnoe."

For a moment the man continued in the same posture, as though he had not heard, or, hearing, had failed to comprehend.

"Mendal! Look at me!"

He turned his head slowly.

"This is Mary Farnoe, here. Do you understand? This is 'The Beloved'; this is 'Rose of the World,' Mendal—'*Fleur d'Amour*'—'*Farnoe*'!"

Mendal's lips parted once or twice, but he seemed not to know what to say. He got up finally and stood with his hands behind his back.

"My house is honored," he stammered with an awkward bow. Then he continued to stare down at her till she cried at him in her strengthless voice:

"And still you don't ask me how I came here—why I came? Have I had to come to the end of the earth to find a man who would ask nothing of me? Sit down again! Nearer! There!

"I'll tell you, Mendal. Because I couldn't bear their watching and waiting and pretending; I couldn't bear their not knowing that *I* knew. Oh, Mendal, I couldn't look forward to the whisperings and telegrams and bulletins. I've amused the street all my life, Mendal—wasn't that enough? Must I die for them in the paper each morning, along with their ball games and stocks and coffee? And then I was frightened too. Mendal, do you know what it is to be frightened?"

A faint color dyed her cheeks, like the sun seen through a shell. She raised herself higher on the pillow, and her voice grew stronger:

"If they'd only told me, Mendal! I knew

they'd done something or other to me after I went to pieces at the Symphony that night, but they were so kind and made nothing of it. I had to get it from a hysterical, eavesdropping maid at the hotel. Three weeks to live! Mendal! Mendal! I who had loved life so, faithless as it had been!

"And then there was the train; the hot, bright, varnished cage rushing me away through the dark; the nurse in and out; little Blomberg in and out, puckering his fat forehead, smoking hard, trying for once in his life to be gay. Poor little Blomberg; I really think he had some sort of a queer affection for me. After all, I made him—the Great Manager. Norway was somewhere in the train too, covering me for the A. P.—like a—a hanging, Mendal.

"They were taking me somewhere for a rest, Blomberg said. But why then the wire for Doctor Westcountry to meet us? Didn't they imagine I knew who Doctor Westcountry was, what he was? Wasn't the name Westcountry enough?

"They were all asleep, even the nurse. But how was I to sleep? The train was a nightmare. It smothered me. I got to thinking to whom I belonged. 'Am I Mary, or am I Farnoe?' I said over and over and over, out loud.

"The train stopped for something. I crept out. I had to have air. Another train from the opposite direction came in between me and my

own. It was like the hand of God. I turned my back and started to run away along a road. I must have been quite out of my head with it all, for the train, I remember, turned down the road after me: I could hear it thundering through the trees behind me—the rain, I suppose. How far did I come, Mendal?"

"Five miles—or better."

"How could I? I don't remember it. There was a sign-post under a lantern with three white fingers weeping for me, and there was a rowboat between two bushes on a hill, and there was a dog that trotted beside me for a while; I don't know how long. And by and by you were behind me, and that frightened me more than anything else had. You were Blomberg coming to get me; you were Doctor Westcountry coming to do something to me; you were Norway coming to 'cover' me; you were— Oh, you must think me a silly, hysterical thing, Mendal."

"*No!*"

Getting to his feet, Mendal thrust his hands deep in his pockets and then took them out again, his beard still shaking with the savage negative. Restless, he snapped the horn beside him as one tests a melon, and then as if appalled by the sudden sound, he glowered down at his boot toes. So he remained while the woman went on talking, as if to herself now, arms outspread and eyes on the ceiling, her voice scarcely audible above the wind:

"Perhaps I died that night, really, and this is another life. It's been so sweet here; it seems as long already as the other was, looking back—that other little life, so crowded, so empty, so happy, so sad! There were triumphant moments in it, Mendal; I try to get hold of them now, and they slip away one by one as I come to them: mist, nothing. Only one stays, very small, so small that I had forgotten it till I lay here in the quiet sky. Just a man in the dark; a boy, really—a feverish boy crying for me to stop. It's like a fairy tale, where the thing that seemed so little eats up all the things that seem so big.

" '*Fleur d'Amour*' they called me. 'Flower of Love' that means, Mendal. Whatever would the Sunday papers have done without Mary Farnoe? What reams on reams they filled with their Farnoe, their queer, distorted Farnoe, whom I never knew. They never saw me. They tried so hard to make something out of me. They wanted me complex, and I couldn't be anything but simple; they made me a butterfly, and I was a rock for faith. I forgive them. I can begin to understand an all-forgiving God. It's so easy to forgive—in heaven. I can even forgive the men who never loved me. I can even smile at them now. They all thought they loved me, poor things! I've no doubt they loved something or other. Youth was what Tom Lord loved, I think. Bennington loved me for the crowds; Von Luhr because I was so essentially American;

Belham because I was so essentially un-American. Terry Kew loved himself.

"I say, I forgive them. They slip away, mist, nothing: an hour eats up years. How I should have smiled then had any one told me I was to look back out of the future and remember that boy as the only lover of Mary Farnoe. It's queer, isn't it, Mendal?"

"What?"

"To call him that. When he never spoke a word of love to me. I never saw him except once, and that in the dark; I don't so much as know his name. But why do you listen to my maunderings, Mendal? Why don't you stick your fingers in your ears? Haven't I asked enough of you, first and last?"

"No. I will listen."

"You won't hear. It's too phantasmal. Ships in the Night! It's just that he seems to fit in here with the wind and ocean and marches and sea birds. He was an interne, I think. (Oh, just then I was getting well in a hospital, slowly, for when I was well I was to marry Von Luhr, and my wildness and fidgetings set me back.) He must have been an interne; he wore white, I remember, and looked like a ghost standing at the foot of my bed in the dark. I knew he had no business there, but, oddly enough, that wasn't my first thought. If he had a queer flair about me, perhaps I had a sort of one about him, too. It may have been just his attitude. At any

rate my first impulse was to say aloud: 'You poor boy!'

"He started and stammered that he hadn't known I was awake. I don't believe there was ever such a queer conversation as that. It sounds inane, like a silly puzzle without an answer.

" 'Why do you do it?' he asked, out of nothing.

" 'Do what?'

"He wouldn't listen to my questions, but shook them off with a fevered impatience; his words seemed to get in the way of his thoughts.

" 'I wish you'd stop! I wish to God you'd stop!'

" 'Stop what?'

" 'They're eating you up—burning you up! Can't you see they're eating you up as fast as they can?'

" 'Who are?'

" 'I wish, for dear Christ's sake, you'd run away from them,' he cried in a passionate whisper.

"I sat up in bed and stared at him. You can't imagine, Mendal, how weird it was. I wasn't frightened in the least. For an instant I'd been appalled at his cheek, but now not even that. I forgot who I was and who he was.

" 'Come around here beside the bed,' I said to him. He came, sank down on his knees, and buried his face in his hands, and when I laid a

hand on his hair he was shivering all over. I had a sense of being a thousand years older than he.

" 'You poor, poor child,' I said. 'You've fallen in love with Mary Farnoe, like the rest of them. What a pity! And you want me to run away with you. Is that it?'

"He protested wildly. 'No, no, no! That's what I'm trying to tell you—*not with anybody!* Never let any one get a hold on you again. If only you could be turned to ice somehow. Ice, cold, quiet! Close the doors on them. Lock them out. They don't bring you anything! Always taking—taking you away, little by little, till one day there'll be nothing left of you!'

"He may have been older than I in years; I might have been his mother. I smoothed his hair, but I couldn't help smiling at him, he seemed so utterly outlandish. I tried to tell him how we weren't made that way; how what there was to spend had to be spent.

" 'You don't understand, poor lad,' I was saying when the night nurse's flash found him there beside my bed. He was discharged next morning, I heard.

"But there it is—quite round and finished, standing by itself."

For a time there was silence; everything in the world seemed to have been said. Mary Farnoe's sentence had carried a curious feeling of finality, like the settling of a last account. She lay on her

side with her hands clasped, searching Mendal's half-lowered face.

"Mendal!"

He looked up, moved by the change in her voice, and found her embarrassed as a girl with the color coming and going across her face.

"I—I don't seem to know how to say it, Mendal. You seem so big and solid and dependable; sometimes it almost frightens me to find myself clinging to you so for everything. And yet it's been so sweet. You've been like a breath of clear air to me after the other sort of thing—their precious frailties, their precious personalities, their precious spirits, their whims. I was always so afraid of doing something to make them not love me of a sudden. But out here, Mendal—why, you're Nobody. And I'm Nobody. It doesn't seem to matter much whether you—" She broke off and for a moment seemed in trouble for breath. "I don't want you to laugh at me," she implored.

"Laugh at you!"

"No. It's about the bell, out there at the last end of everything."

Mendal checked her there by putting out a hand and covered both of hers, and his eyes narrowed a little.

"You've been thinking about that bell a good deal lately."

"Oh, please, don't think I'm romantic or melodramatic. No; it's deeper than that, Mendal.

It's *me*. I've always had that same passion, to carry through, to go through to the end, whatever it might be. Listen, Mendal! Hear! It knows me better than you do, Mendal."

"Do you mean," he put to her slowly, "that you would like to go out there to-night?"

Because she had expected him to be aghast at her, she was staggered by his grave possession. He got up and moved to the door, where he turned with his hand on the latch.

"Do you think you're strong enough, on a night like this?"

"Yes, yes! I feel stronger than I have for weeks."

"I'll be back in a minute."

It was more than sixty seconds before he came back into the room and stood over her, studying the face against the pillow.

"You look like a bride," he said.

Bending over suddenly, he wrapped the bedclothes tight about her, picked her up in his arms, and went down-stairs and out of the house.

Once beyond the half shelter of the porch, the wind claimed them. Mendal's first rush carried him as far as the break of the hill, but there he hesitated and looked down at the face against his shoulder, dim-gray in its mufflings. His own face was gray, and a bead of perspiration clung for an instant on his forehead before the wind whisked it away.

"Do you want to go?" he asked, bending so that his lips were close to her ear.

"Am I heavy?"

He shook his head savagely

"What's that, Mendal—over there?"

He followed the direction of her eyes, slanting over his shoulder. Beyond Barnham Head Village the moon was rising, casting a dome of light before it into the sky, and vertically across this dome, from a further abutment of the hill, rose the stark black shape of a cross. "That?" he hesitated an instant. "That's the telegraph."

"But I didn't know—"

"It's come lately."

"Oh!" She studied his eyes for a moment, her lips still half parted with the exclamation, and then: "What difference does it make, after all? Why do we stop here so long, Mendal?"

He started down the slope, sliding and spattering the loose sand, waded through the bit of marsh at the bottom that sucked at his shoes, found the hard, uneven footing of the breakwater, and passed out once more into the wind.

It was one of those nights that come once or twice in an autumn, swept clean of all the dusts and mists of the world, everything shorn and incisive: even the sound of the water lashing through the crevices of the sea wall had an edged quality, like liquid blades playing in the rock. Mendal had to keep sharp watch of his path, for even in the growing light the tilted slabs

were treacherous footing. When the arm about his neck, tightening, begged his attention, he had to bring up and stand balanced against the wind. There was nothing left in his face now: his stare was dull, almost vacant.

"What is it?" he asked. He bent to catch her answer.

"I'm getting so small, Mendal, and you're growing bigger and bigger all the while. And I don't hear the bell any more. You—Mendal, you're not fooling me?'

"No!" His voice was sharp. "The surf at the head drowns it now. You won't hear it any more till we come up with it."

He went forward again. Her weight, frail as it was, began to tell. When he had reached the square hewn boulder rising like a sort of key-stone at the center of the wall, he had to pause a moment in its lee, resting his back against the rock.

"Is it here?" she asked him.

"No, no! I'm only getting my wind; that's all."

"Why won't you look at me, Mendal?"

For some reason or other it seemed an effort for him. For a moment she lay there watching him.

"Why won't you say it, Mendal?"

Her hand crept up to touch his cheek, and it was whiter now than her own.

"You would have said it, Mendal, if I hadn't

told you about—about me. But what difference can that make—now—out here? The world's gone. We're all there are, Mendal; one man and one woman. But why should I want you to tell me, after all? It's so different from anything else that ever happened. I can love you to the last depths, Mendal, without it's seeming so fatal a thing whether you love me or not. Of course that would be sweet, incredibly—"

He had forgotten to be careful with her or with himself. His kiss left them both shaken and breathless. "You— You—" He seemed unable to say anything but that: "You— You— You—"

He was going forward again, almost at a run. The breakwater came to an end: he was floundering up the rise to Barnham Head, one instant in the lee, the next, crushed and deafened, face to face with the driven sea. Farnoe's fingers dragged at his cheek.

"Where is it, Mendal? Mendal!"

"Look!" He pulled the blanket away from her face. A puff of spray like cannon smoke drove across them, blinding the eyes.

"Look again!"

There was nothing to see, nothing to take hold of or comprehend. Grayness swooned into blackness; a thin, wide tongue lashed out of the smother, glistening with dim stars, clotted with ropes of spume: licked up at them across the sand with a sinister hunger; fell back again,

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leaving a serpent of kelp at Mendal's feet, writhing and faintly luminous.

"Look!" he shouted for the third time, shaking her. "Out there! Beyond!"

But she had turned her face the other way.

"Why do you do this? Mendal! Mendal! Why do you frighten me so? Why don't you take me to the bell?"

"I am! It's out there—over the outer bar. Come!"

He started down the shining slope, but now she was crying terribly in his ear: "*Mendal! Mendal! Mendal!*"

"Good God!" he shouted. "What's the matter?" Stumbling back again, he pushed her face away from his neck and stared into the staring eyes.

"*Don't you want to go?*"

They looked incredibly old, both of them! . . .

Somehow or other they were on higher ground and wire-grass was catching at Mendal's shoes and trying to trip him. He stumbled once and went down on one knee, but the sand was soft, and he did not lose hold of his burden. A building with two yellow windows came around a hummock to meet them.

It was hard for Mary Farnoe to remember what happened after that for a time. Whatever it was, it led to a kind of bed built into the side of a small room filled with papers and outlandish instruments and warmth and light.

Some one had hold of one of her wrists. She began to realize that it was Mendal and that his eyes, fixed and unwinking, were holding her up out of something. There were others in the room: an old man with a blue coat and gray whiskers puffing out from his chin like an inverted halo; still other men behind him.

"Where am I?" she asked with her lips, for she seemed to have no voice.

Mendal's eyes came down a little closer, still holding her tight.

"You're at Barnham Head, Mary Farnoe: at the life-saving station."

"I'm so weak. Dear me, so w-e-a-k."

"Of course you're weak, like a babe on its birth night. You'll be stronger by and by. Do you understand? Stronger by and by!"

Without moving his eyes, he gave some word or sign that sent the others out of the room, the captain last, combing his whiskers with his fingers and peering over his shoulder with a light of awe.

"The broth," Mendal called after him. And then to Mary Farnoe: "Open your mouth and swallow this. It's a little brandy. There!"

She lay quiet as death itself, watching him with the formless wonder of a newborn watching a candle flame. He began to speak with a painful deliberation, holding himself desperately in hand, making each word count as a separate thing, hammering, hammering!

"Mary Farnoe, listen! *You couldn't go through!* You failed in that rôle; that gesture is gone. I proved it to you. You had hold of a fine fancy there; a deep, dramatic symbolism—Land's End, Eternal Ocean, the Bell calling, calling, day and night, from the bosom of Oblivion. Good God! I don't wonder it got hold of that fantastic spirit of yours. A big idea—yes, yes. *But it fell flat.* Now you're starting all over again, on something new. It's a shock—birth is always a shock. Listen, Mary Farnoe! I want you to understand this; learn it by heart; it's the lines of your new rôle: *There is absolutely nothing organically wrong with you now.* That was all over two weeks ago. In a month you will be yourself. Do you get this, word by word? No, no; don't look away from me. You couldn't if you tried. That's better! Here's another swallow of the brandy, and then a little broth. You'll see how thoroughly I have it over you; the captain here will tell you I 'phoned about this broth before we left the house an hour ago. I'll hold you up a moment, so!"

The spirits and hot broth began to tell; a new color crept into her cheeks as she lay there, with no will of her own.

"You talk so queerly, Mendal; so different, so new. I—I hardly know you, Mendal." It may have been five minutes before she spoke again. "Why did they give me three weeks to live, then?"

"Three weeks as you were living then—on your heart and nerve."

"Why didn't you tell me before, Mendal—that I was all right?"

"What would have been the use? You wouldn't have believed me. No, no, Mary Farnoe; I don't think you'd believe anything in the world unless the stage were set for it—as if—well, you wouldn't have your life saved except in a life-saving station. Truth is a dénouement—or it is nothing."

Another minute passed while she gazed at him dreamily.

"Will I sing again, Mendal?"

"That's on the knees of the gods, Mary"—he tried to smile—"the gallery gods! You'll do what your audience expects of you, even the impossible."

"But M-e-n-d-a-l—" A hand came toward him across the covers, appealing.

"You remember what you said once, Mary? 'What's to be spent must be spent'?"

"But what if I was wrong, Mendal?"

He looked terribly tired and white. His hands lay palms upward on his thighs, and for a moment his eyes went heavily from one to the other, as if he were weighing something against something. "And what if you were right?" he said.

He got up suddenly, as if he were afraid of himself, and, turning to a telephone on the wall,

took down the receiver: "Is this the Barnham Head House? . . . May I speak with— Oh, is it you, Blomberg? Yes? We've turned the corner, Blomberg. May I speak with Norway? . . . Thanks!"

It was hard to wait there, staring at a knot in the paneling; he seemed actually to grow whiter and gaunter with every dragging second.

"Oh, hello! hello! Norway? . . . It's Westcountry speaking, Norway. I'll give you a leader, Norway; put it on the wire to-night. 'Farnoe will sing in three months.' That's all. . . . Thanks. Thanks, Norway. Good night!"

"Now," he said, his eyes still on the knot, "now you're playing to the old audience again. I'm tired," he went on. "And I'm afraid to look at you."

"Westcountry," came her wondering voice. "Westcountry! You're—you're *Westcountry!*"

"You're angry!"

When she didn't speak he had to cover up the silence somehow.

"Blomberg will be glad to get away. Poor Blomberg! the Barnham Head House isn't quite up to Blomberg's style, though he's been a surprising brick about it. And Norway. How they've played chess down there, and how they hate chess! I've wanted them to go, but they wouldn't. They were the ones you saw in the buggy with me that night. That was my train that came in between you and yours. It took us a

little while to pick up your trail. Mary, Mary, if you knew how I'd dreaded this moment, when I should have to tell you."

"Why?"

He had to look at her when she spoke so, and now it was his eyes that were bewildered and hers sure and full of light.

"I was afraid it might— Mary, can't you see that—what you called the 'balcony hung over the edge'—'one woman and one man—nobody and nobody'—"

"Was that sweet to you, too?"

"Sweet? Is it sweet when a dream comes true, even for a little while—a dream one's been alone with for ten years? Once I knelt in the dark, Mary, beside a bed in a hospital, very young and foolish and feverish—"

And there he was down on his knees again with his face buried in her hands, and she was smiling at him again, but not because he was outlandish this time.

"I knew," she whispered. "I began to know almost a week ago. Do you know how? Well, there couldn't be two of you. I—I thought you were going to tell me to-night."

Her lips were against his cheek.

"Does that mean, Mary—that kiss—that it doesn't matter, after all? That even without my romantic trappings: rather gray and prosaic—"

Her low laughter was like a caress.

"The sea must be going down," she whispered after a long time. "I heard the bell, just then, very faintly."

"Yes! The bell's a masquer too. It's gone back to the rôle that made it famous—warning people off the bar."

THE WOMAN AT SEVEN BROTHERS

I TELL you sir, I was innocent. I didn't know any more about the world at twenty-two than some do at twelve. My uncle and aunt in Duxbury brought me up strict; I studied hard in high school, I worked hard after hours, and I went to church twice on Sundays, and I can't see it's right to put me in a place like this, with crazy people. Oh yes, I know they're crazy—you can't tell *me*. As for what they said in court about finding her with her husband, that's the Inspector's lie, sir, because he's down on me, and wants to make it look like my fault.

No, sir, I can't say as I thought she was handsome—not at first. For one thing, her lips were too thin and white, and her color was bad. I'll tell you a fact, sir; that first day I came off to the Light I was sitting on my cot in the store-room (that's where the assistant keeper sleeps at the Seven Brothers), as lonesome as I could be, away from home for the first time and the water all around me, and, even though it was a calm day, pounding enough on the ledge to send a kind of a *woom-woom-woom* whining up through all that

solid rock of the tower. And when old Fedderson poked his head down from the living-room with the sunshine above making a kind of bright frame around his hair and whiskers, to give me a cheery, "Make yourself to home, son!" I remember I said to myself: "*He's* all right. I'll get along with *him*. But his wife's enough to sour milk." That was queer, because she was so much under him in age—'long about twenty-eight or so, and him nearer fifty. But that's what I said, sir.

Of course that feeling wore off, same as any feeling will wear off sooner or later in a place like the Seven Brothers. Cooped up in a place like that you come to know folks so well that you forget what they *do* look like. There was a long time I never noticed her, any more than you'd notice the cat. We used to sit of an evening around the table, as if you were Fedderson there, and me here, and her somewhere back there, in the rocker, knitting. Fedderson would be working on his Jacob's-ladder, and I'd be reading. He'd been working on that Jacob's-ladder a year, I guess, and every time the Inspector came off with the tender he was so astonished to see how good that ladder was that the old man would go to work and make it better. That's all he lived for.

If I was reading, as I say, I daren't take my eyes off the book, or Fedderson had me. And then he'd begin—what the Inspector said about

him. How surprised the member of the board had been, that time, to see everything so clean about the light. What the Inspector had said about Fedderson's being stuck here in a second-class light—best keeper on the coast. And so on and so on, till either he or I had to go aloft and have a look at the wicks.

He'd been there twenty-three years, all told, and he'd got used to the feeling that he was kept down unfair—so used to it, I guess, that he fed on it, and told himself how folks ashore would talk when he was dead and gone—best keeper on the coast—kept down unfair. Not that he said that to me. No, he was far too loyal and humble and respectful, doing his duty without complaint, as anybody could see.

And all that time, night after night, hardly ever a word out of the woman. As I remember it, she seemed more like a piece of furniture than anything else—not even a very good cook, nor over and above tidy. One day, when he and I were trimming the lamp, he passed the remark that his *first* wife used to dust the lens and take a pride in it. Not that he said a word against Anna, though. He never said a word against any living mortal; he was too upright.

I don't know how it came about; or, rather, I *do* know, but it was so sudden, and so far away from my thoughts, that it shocked me, like the world turned over. It was at prayers. That night I remember Fedderson was uncommon

long-winded. We'd had a batch of newspapers out by the tender, and at such times the old man always made a long watch of it, getting the world straightened out. For one thing, the United States minister to Turkey was dead. Well, from him and his soul, Fedderson got on to Turkey and the Presbyterian college there, and from that to heathen in general. He rambled on and on, like the surf on the ledge, *woom-woom-woom*, never coming to an end.

You know how you'll be at prayers sometimes. My mind strayed. I counted the canes in the chair-seat where I was kneeling; I plaited a corner of the table-cloth between my fingers for a spell, and by and by my eyes went wandering up the back of the chair.

The woman, sir, was looking at me. Her chair was back to mine, close, and both our heads were down in the shadow under the edge of the table, with Fedderson clear over on the other side by the stove. And there were her two eyes hunting mine between the spindles in the shadow. You won't believe me, sir, but I tell you I felt like jumping to my feet and running out of the room—it was so queer.

I don't know what her husband was praying about after that. His voice didn't mean anything, no more than the seas on the ledge away down there. I went to work to count the canes in the seat again, but all my eyes were in the top of my head. It got so I couldn't stand it. We

were at the Lord's prayer, saying it singsong together, when I had to look up again. And there her two eyes were, between the spindles, hunting mine. Just then all of us were saying, "Forgive us our trespasses—" I thought of it afterward.

When we got up she was turned the other way, but I couldn't help seeing her cheeks were red. It was terrible. I wondered if Fedderson would notice, though I might have known he wouldn't —not him. He was in too much of a hurry to get at his Jacob's-ladder, and then he had to tell me for the tenth time what the Inspector 'd said that day about getting him another light—Kingdom Come, maybe, he said.

I made some excuse or other and got away. Once in the store-room, I sat down on my cot and stayed there a long time, feeling queerer than anything. I read a chapter in the Bible, I don't know why. After I'd got my boots off I sat with them in my hands for as much as an hour, I guess, staring at the oil-tank and its lopsided shadow on the wall. I tell you, sir, I was shocked. I was only twenty-two remember, and I was shocked and horrified.

And when I did turn in, finally, I didn't sleep at all well. Two or three times I came to, sitting straight up in bed. Once I got up and opened the outer door to have a look. The water was like glass, dim, without a breath of wind, and the moon just going down. Over on the black shore

I made out two lights in a village, like a pair of eyes watching. Lonely? My, yes! Lonely and nervous. I had a horror of her, sir. The dinghy-boat hung on its davits just there in front of the door, and for a minute I had an awful hankering to climb into it, lower away, and row off, no matter where. It sounds foolish.

Well, it seemed foolish next morning, with the sun shining and everything as usual—Fedderson sucking his pen and wagging his head over his eternal "log," and his wife down in the rocker with her head in the newspaper, and her breakfast work still waiting. I guess that jarred it out of me more than anything else—sight of her slouched down there, with her stringy, yellow hair and her dusty apron and the pale back of her neck, reading the Society Notes. *Society Notes!* Think of it! For the first time since I came to Seven Brothers I wanted to laugh.

I guess I did laugh when I went aloft to clean the lamp and found everything so free and breezy, gulls flying high and little whitecaps making under a westerly. It was like feeling a big load dropped off your shoulders. Fedderson came up with his dust-rag and cocked his head at me.

"What's the matter, Ray?" said he.

"Nothing," said I. And then I couldn't help it. "Seems kind of out of place for society notes," said I, "out here at Seven Brothers."

He was the other side of the lens, and when he looked at me he had a thousand eyes, all sober,

For a minute I thought he was going on dusting, but then he came out and sat down on a sill.

"Sometimes," said he, "I get to thinking it may be a mite dull for her out here. She's pretty young, Ray. Not much more'n a girl, hardly."

"Not much more'n a *girl*"! It gave me a turn, sir, as though I'd seen my aunt in short dresses.

"It's a good home for her, though," he went on slow. "I've seen a lot worse ashore, Ray. Of course if I could get a shore light—"

"Kingdom Come's a shore light."

He looked at me out of his deep-set eyes, and then he turned them around the light-room, where he'd been so long.

"No," said he, wagging his head. "It ain't for such as me."

I never saw so humble a man.

"But look here," he went on, more cheerful. "As I was telling her just now, a month from yesterday's our fourth anniversary, and I'm going to take her ashore for the day and give her a holiday—new hat and everything. A girl wants a mite of excitement now and then, Ray."

There it was again, that "girl." It gave me the fidgets, sir. I had to do something about it. It's close quarters for last names in a light, and I'd taken to calling him Uncle Matt soon after I came. Now, when I was at table that noon,

I spoke over to where she was standing by the stove, getting him another help of chowder.

"I guess I'll have some, too, *Aunt* Anna," said I, matter of fact.

She never said a word nor gave a sign—just stood there kind of round-shouldered, dipping the chowder. And that night at prayers I hitched my chair around the table, with its back the other way.

You get awful lazy in a lighthouse, some ways. No matter how much tinkering you've got, there's still a lot of time and there's such a thing as too much reading. The changes in weather get monotonous, too, by and by; the light burns the same on a thick night as it does on a fair one. Of course there's the ships, north-bound, south-bound — wind-jammers, freighters, passenger-boats full of people. In the watches at night you can see their lights go by, and wonder what they are, how they're laden, where they'll fetch up, and all. I used to do that almost every evening when it was my first watch, sitting out on the walk-around up there with my legs hanging over the edge and my chin propped on the railing—lazy. The Boston boat was the prettiest to see, with her three tiers of port-holes lit, like a string of pearls wrapped round and round a woman's neck—well away, too, for the ledge must have made a couple of hundred fathoms off the Light, like a white dog-tooth of a breaker, even on the darkest night.

Well, I was lolling there one night, as I say, watching the Boston boat go by, not thinking of anything special, when I heard the door on the other side of the tower open and footsteps coming around to me.

By and by I nodded toward the boat and passed the remark that she was fetching in uncommon close to-night. No answer. I made nothing of that, for oftentimes Fedderson wouldn't answer, and after I'd watched the lights crawling on through the dark a spell, just to make conversation I said I guessed there'd be a bit of weather before long.

"I've noticed," said I, "when there's weather coming on, and the wind in the northeast, you can hear the orchestra playing aboard of her just over there. I make it out now. Do you?"

"Yes. Oh—yes! *I hear it all right!*"

You can imagine I started. It wasn't him, but *her*. And there was something in the way she said that speech, sir—something—well—unnatural. Like a hungry animal snapping at a person's hand.

I turned and looked at her sidewise. She was standing by the railing, leaning a little outward, the top of her from the waist picked out bright by the lens behind her. I didn't know what in the world to say, and yet I had a feeling I ought not to sit there mum.

"I wonder," said I, "what that captain's thinking of, fetching in so handy to-night. It's

no way. I tell you, if 'twasn't for this light, she'd go to work and pile up on the ledge some thick night—"

She turned at that and stared straight into the lens. I didn't like the look of her face. Somehow, with its edges cut hard all around and its two eyes closed down to slits, like a cat's, it made a kind of mask.

"And then," I went on, uneasy enough—"and then where'd all their music be of a sudden, and their goings-on and their singing—"

"And dancing!" She clipped me off so quick it took my breath.

"D-d-dancing?" said I.

"That's dance-music," said she. She was looking at the boat again.

"How do you know?" I felt I had to keep on talking.

Well, sir—she laughed. I looked at her. She had on a shawl of some stuff or other that shined in the light; she had it pulled tight around her with her two hands in front at her breast, and I saw her shoulders swaying in tune.

"How do I *know?*" she cried. Then she laughed again, the same kind of a laugh. It was queer, sir, to see her, and to hear her. She turned, as quick as that, and leaned toward me. "Don't you know how to dance, Ray?" said she.

"N-no," I managed, and I was going to say "*Aunt Anna,*" but the thing choked in my throat.

I tell you she was looking square at me all the time with her two eyes and moving with the music as if she didn't know it. By heavens, sir, it came over me of a sudden that she wasn't so bad-looking, after all. I guess I must have sounded like a fool.

"You—you see," said I, "she's cleared the rip there now, and the music's gone. You—you—hear?"

"Yes," said she, turning back slow. "That's where it stops every night—night after night—it stops just there—at the rip."

When she spoke again her voice was different. I never heard the like of it, thin and taut as a thread. It made me shiver, sir.

"I hate 'em!" That's what she said. "I hate 'em all. I'd like to see 'em dead. I'd love to see 'em torn apart on the rocks, night after night. I could bathe my hands in their blood, night after night."

And do you know, sir, I saw it with my own eyes, her hands moving in each other above the rail. But it was her voice, though. I didn't know what to do, or what to say, so I poked my head through the railing and looked down at the water. I don't think I'm a coward, sir, but it was like a cold—ice-cold—hand, taking hold of my beating heart.

When I looked up finally, she was gone. By and by I went in and had a look at the lamp, hardly knowing what I was about. Then, seeing

by my watch it was time for the old man to come on duty, I started to go below. In the Seven Brothers, you understand, the stair goes down in a spiral through a well against the south wall, and first there's the door to the keeper's room, and then you come to another, and that's the living-room, and then down to the store-room. And at night, if you don't carry a lantern, it's as black as the pit.

Well, down I went, sliding my hand along the rail, and as usual I stopped to give a rap on the keeper's door, in case he was taking a nap after supper. Sometimes he did.

I stood there, blind as a bat, with my mind still up on the walk-around. There was no answer to my knock. I hadn't expected any. Just from habit, and with my right foot already hanging down for the next step, I reached out to give the door one more tap for luck.

Do you know, sir, my hand didn't fetch up on anything. The door had been there a second before, and now the door wasn't there. My hand just went on going through the dark, on and on, and I didn't seem to have sense or power enough to stop it. There didn't seem any air in the well to breathe, and my ears were drumming to the surf—that's how scared I was. And then my hand touched the flesh of a face, and something in the dark said, "Oh!" no louder than a sigh.

Next thing I knew, sir, I was down in the living-room, warm and yellow-lit, with Fedderson

cocking his head at me across the table, where he was at that eternal Jacob's-ladder of his.

"What's the matter, Ray?" said he. "Lord's sake, Ray!"

"Nothing," said I. Then I think I told him I was sick. That night I wrote a letter to A. L. Peters, the grain-dealer in Duxbury, asking for a job—even though it wouldn't go ashore for a couple of weeks, just the writing of it made me feel better.

It's hard to tell you how those two weeks went by. I don't know why, but I felt like hiding in a corner all the time. I had to come to meals. But I didn't look at her, though, not once, unless it was by accident. Fedderson thought I was still ailing and nagged me to death with advice and so on. One thing I took care not to do, I can tell you, and that was to knock on his door till I'd made certain he wasn't below in the living-room—though I was tempted to.

Yes, sir; that's a queer thing, and I wouldn't tell you if I hadn't set out to give you the truth. Night after night, stopping there on the landing in that black pit, the air gone out of my lungs and the surf drumming in my ears and sweat standing cold on my neck—and one hand lifting up in the air—God forgive me, sir! Maybe I did wrong not to look at her more, drooping about her work in her gingham apron, with her hair stringing.

When the Inspector came off with the tender,

that time, I told him I was through. That's when he took the dislike to me, I guess, for he looked at me kind of sneering and said, soft as I was, I'd have to put up with it till next relief. And then, said he, there'd be a whole house-cleaning at Seven Brothers, because he'd gotten Fedderson the berth at Kingdom Come. And with that he slapped the old man on the back.

I wish you could have seen Fedderson, sir. He sat down on my cot as if his knees had given 'way. Happy? You'd think he'd be happy, with all his dreams come true. Yes, he was happy, beaming all over—for a minute. Then, sir, he began to shrivel up. It was like seeing a man cut down in his prime before your eyes. He began to wag his head.

"No," said he. "No, no; it's not for such as me. I'm good enough for Seven Brothers, and that's all, Mr. Bayliss. That's all."

And for all the Inspector could say, that's what he stuck to. He'd figured himself a martyr so many years, nursed that injustice like a mother with her first-born, sir; and now in his old age, so to speak, they weren't to rob him of it. Fedderson was going to wear out his life in a second-class light, and folks would talk—that was his idea. I heard him hailing down as the tender was casting off:

"See you to-morrow, Mr. Bayliss. Yep. Coming ashore with the wife for a spree. Anniversary. Yep."

But he didn't sound much like a spree. They *had* robbed him, partly, after all. I wondered what *she* thought about it. I didn't know till night. She didn't show up to supper, which Fedderson and I got ourselves—had a headache, he said. It was my early watch. I went and lit up and came back to read a spell. He was finishing off the Jacob's-ladder, and thoughtful, like a man that's lost a treasure. Once or twice I caught him looking about the room on the sly. It was pathetic, sir.

Going up the second time, I stepped out on the walk-around to have a look at things. She was there on the seaward side, wrapped in that silky thing. A fair sea was running across the ledge and it was coming on a little thick—not too thick. Off to the right the Boston boat was blowing, *whroom-whroom!* Creeping up on us, quarter-speed. There was another fellow behind her, and a fisherman's conch farther offshore.

I don't know why, but I stopped beside her and leaned on the rail. She didn't appear to notice me, one way or another. We stood and we stood, listening to the whistles, and the longer we stood the more it got on my nerves, her not noticing me. I suppose she'd been too much on my mind lately. I began to be put out. I scraped my feet. I coughed. By and by I said out loud:

"Look here, I guess I better get out the fog-horn and give those fellows a toot."

"Why?" said she, without moving her head—calm as that.

"*Why?*" It gave me a turn, sir. For a minute I stared at her. "Why? Because if she don't pick up this light before very many minutes she'll be too close in to wear—tide 'll have her on the rocks—that's why!"

I couldn't see her face, but I could see one of her silk shoulders lift a little, like a shrug. And there I kept on staring at her, a dumb one, sure enough. I know what brought me to was hearing the Boston boat's three sharp toots as she picked up the light—mad as anything—and swung her helm a-port. I turned away from her, sweat stringing down my face, and walked around to the door. It was just as well, too, for the feed-pipe was plugged in the lamp and the wicks were popping. She'd have been out in another five minutes, sir.

When I'd finished, I saw that woman standing in the doorway. Her eyes were bright. I had a horror of her, sir, a living horror.

"If only the light had been out," said she, low and sweet.

"God forgive you," said I. "You don't know what you're saying."

She went down the stair into the well, winding out of sight, and as long as I could see her, her eyes were watching mine. When I went, myself, after a few minutes, she was waiting for me on that first landing, standing still in the dark.

She took hold of my hand, though I tried to get it away.

"Good-by," said she in my ear.

"Good-by?" said I. I didn't understand.

"You heard what he said to-day—about Kingdom Come? Be it so—on his own head. I'll never come back here. Once I set foot ashore — I've got friends in Brightonboro, Ray."

I got away from her and started on down. But I stopped. "Brightonboro?" I whispered back. "Why do you tell *me?*" My throat was raw to the words, like a sore.

"So you'd know," said she.

Well, sir, I saw them off next morning, down that new Jacob's-ladder into the dinghy-boat, her in a dress of blue velvet and him in his best cutaway and derby—rowing away, smaller and smaller, the two of them. And then I went back and sat on my cot, leaving the door open and the ladder still hanging down the wall, along with the boat-falls.

I don't know whether it was relief, or what. I suppose I must have been worked up even more than I'd thought those past weeks, for now it was all over I was like a rag. I got down on my knees, sir, and prayed to God for the salvation of my soul, and when I got up and climbed to the living-room it was half past twelve by the clock. There was rain on the windows and the sea was running blue-black under the sun. I'd

sat there all that time not knowing there was a squall.

It was funny; the glass stood high, but those black squalls kept coming and going all afternoon, while I was at work up in the light-room. And I worked hard, to keep myself busy. First thing I knew it was five, and no sign of the boat yet. It began to get dim and kind of purplish-gray over the land. The sun was down. I lit up, made everything snug, and got out the night-glasses to have another look for that boat. He'd said he intended to get back before five. No sign. And then, standing there, it came over me that of course he wouldn't be coming off—he'd be hunting *her*, poor old fool. It looked like I had to stand two men's watches that night.

Never mind. I felt like myself again, even if I hadn't had any dinner or supper. Pride came to me that night on the walk-around, watching the boats go by—little boats, big boats, the Boston boat with all her pearls and her dance-music. They couldn't see me; they didn't know who I was; but to the last of them, they depended on *me*. They say a man must be born again. Well, I was born again. I breathed deep in the wind.

Dawn broke hard and red as a dying coal. I put out the light and started to go below. Born again; yes, sir. I felt so good I whistled in the well, and when I came to that first door on the stair I reached out in the dark to give it a

rap for luck. And then, sir, the hair prickled all over my scalp, when I found my hand just going on and on through the air, the same as it had gone once before, and all of a sudden I wanted to yell, because I thought I was going to touch flesh. It's funny what their just forgetting to close their door did to me, isn't it?

Well, I reached for the latch and pulled it to with a bang and ran down as if a ghost was after me. I got up some coffee and bread and bacon for breakfast. I drank the coffee. But somehow I couldn't eat, all along of that open door. The light in the room was blood. I got to thinking. I thought how she'd talked about those men, women and children on the rocks, and how she'd made to bathe her hands over the rail. I almost jumped out of my chair then; it seemed for a wink she was there beside the stove watching me with that queer half-smile—really, I seemed to see her for a flash across the red table-cloth in the red light of dawn.

"Look here!" said I to myself, sharp enough; and then I gave myself a good laugh and went below. There I took a look out of the door, which was still open, with the ladder hanging down. I made sure to see the poor old fool come pulling around the point before very long now.

My boots were hurting a little, and, taking them off, I lay down on the cot to rest, and somehow I went to sleep. I had horrible dreams. I

saw her again standing in that blood-red kitchen, and she seemed to be washing her hands, and the surf on the ledge was whining up the tower, louder and louder all the time, and what it whined was, "Night after night—night after night." What woke me was cold water in my face.

The store-room was in gloom. That scared me at first; I thought night had come, and remembered the light. But then I saw the gloom was of a storm. The floor was shining wet, and the water in my face was spray, flung up through the open door. When I ran to close it it almost made me dizzy to see the gray-and-white breakers marching past. The land was gone; the sky shut down heavy overhead; there was a piece of wreckage on the back of a swell, and the Jacob's-ladder was carried clean away. How that sea had picked up so quick I can't think. I looked at my watch and it wasn't four in the afternoon yet.

When I closed the door, sir, it was almost dark in the store-room. I'd never been in the Light before in a gale of wind. I wondered why I was shivering so, till I found it was the floor below me shivering, and the walls and stair. Horrible crunchings and grindings ran away up the tower, and now and then there was a great thud somewhere, like a cannon-shot in a cave. I tell you, sir, I was alone, and I was in a mortal fright for a minute or so. And yet I had to get

myself together. There was the light up there not tended to, and an early dark coming on and a heavy night and all, and I had to go. And I had to pass that door.

You'll say it's foolish, sir, and maybe it *was* foolish. Maybe it was because I hadn't eaten. But I began thinking of that door up there the minute I set foot on the stair, and all the way up through that howling dark well I dreaded to pass it. I told myself I wouldn't stop. I didn't stop. I felt the landing underfoot and I went on, four steps, five—and then I couldn't. I turned and went back. I put out my hand and it went on into nothing. That door, sir, was open again.

I left it be; I went on up to the light-room and set to work. It was Bedlam there, sir, screeching Bedlam, but I took no notice. I kept my eyes down. I trimmed those seven wicks, sir, as neat as ever they were trimmed; I polished the brass till it shone, and I dusted the lens. It wasn't till that was done that I let myself look back to see who it was standing there, half out of sight in the well. It was her, sir.

"Where'd you come from?" I asked. I remember my voice was sharp.

"Up Jacob's-ladder," said she, and hers was like the syrup of flowers.

I shook my head. I was savage, sir. "The ladder's carried away."

"I cast it off," said she, with a smile.

"Then," said I, "you must have come while I

was asleep." Another thought came on me heavy as a ton of lead. "And where's *he?*" said I. "Where's the boat?"

"He's drowned," said she, as easy as that. "And I let the boat go adrift. You wouldn't hear me when I called."

"But look here," said I. "If you came through the store-room, why didn't you wake me up? Tell me that!" It sounds foolish enough, me standing like a lawyer in court, trying to prove she *couldn't* be there.

She didn't answer for a moment. I guess she sighed, though I couldn't hear for the gale, and her eyes grew soft, sir, so soft.

"I couldn't," said she. "You looked so peaceful—dear one."

My cheeks and neck went hot, sir, as if a warm iron was laid on them. I didn't know what to say. I began to stammer, "What do you mean—" but she was going back down the stair, out of sight. My God! sir, and I used not to think she was good-looking!

I started to follow her. I wanted to know what she meant. Then I said to myself, "If I don't go—if I wait here—she'll come back." And I went to the weather side and stood looking out of the window. Not that there was much to see. It was growing dark, and the Seven Brothers looked like the mane of a running horse, a great, vast, white horse running into the wind. The air was a-welter with it. I caught one peep of

a fisherman, lying down flat trying to weather the ledge, and I said, "God help them all tonight," and then I went hot at sound of that "God."

I was right about her, though. She was back again. I wanted her to speak first, before I turned, but she wouldn't. I didn't hear her go out; I didn't know what she was up to till I saw her coming outside on the walk-around, drenched wet already. I pounded on the glass for her to come in and not be a fool; if she heard she gave no sign of it.

There she stood, and there I stood watching her. Lord, sir—was it just that I'd never had eyes to see? Or are there women who bloom? Her clothes were shining on her, like a carving, and her hair was let down like a golden curtain tossing and streaming in the gale, and there she stood with her lips half open, drinking, and her eyes half closed, gazing straight away over the Seven Brothers, and her shoulders swaying, as if in tune with the wind and water and all the ruin. And when I looked at her hands over the rail, sir, they were moving in each other as if they bathed, and then I remembered, sir.

A cold horror took me. I knew now why she had come back again. She wasn't a woman—she was a devil. I turned my back on her. I said to myself: "It's time to light up. You've got to light up"—like that, over and over, out loud. My hand was shivering so I could hardly

find a match; and when I scratched it, it only flared a second and then went out in the back draught from the open door. She was standing in the doorway, looking at me. It's queer, sir, but I felt like a child caught in mischief.

"I—I—was going to light up," I managed to say, finally.

"Why?" said she. No, I can't say it as she did.

"*Why?*" said I. "*My God!*"

She came nearer, laughing, as if with pity, low, you know. "Your God? And who is your God? What is God? What is anything on a night like this?"

I drew back from her. All I could say anything about was the light.

"Why not the dark?" said she. "Dark is softer than light—tenderer—dearer than light. From the dark up here, away up here in the wind and storm, we can watch the ships go by, you and I. And you love me so. You've loved me so long, Ray."

"I never have!" I struck out at her. "I don't! I don't!"

Her voice was lower than ever, but there was the same laughing pity in it. "Oh yes, you have." And she was near me again.

"I have?" I yelled. "I'll show you! I'll show you if I have!"

I got another match, sir, and scratched it on the brass. I gave it to the first wick, the little

wick that's inside all the others. It bloomed like a yellow flower. "I *have?*" I yelled, and gave it to the next.

Then there was a shadow, and I saw she was leaning beside me, her two elbows on the brass, her two arms stretched out above the wicks, her bare forearms and wrists and hands. I gave a gasp:

"Take care! You'll burn them! For God's sake—"

She didn't move or speak. The match burned my fingers and went out, and all I could do was stare at those arms of hers, helpless. I'd never noticed her arms before. They were rounded and graceful and covered with a soft down, like a breath of gold. Then I heard her speaking, close to my ear:

"Pretty arms," she said. "Pretty arms!"

I turned. Her eyes were fixed on mine. They seemed heavy, as if with sleep, and yet between their lids they were two wells, deep and deep, and as if they held all the things I'd ever thought or dreamed in them. I looked away from them, at her lips. Her lips were red as poppies, heavy with redness. They moved, and I heard them speaking:

"Poor boy, you love me so, and you want to kiss me—don't you?"

"No," said I. But I couldn't turn around. I looked at her hair. I'd always thought it was stringy hair. Some hair curls naturally with

damp, they say, and perhaps that was it, for there were pearls of wet on it, and it was thick and shimmering around her face, making soft shadows by the temples. There was green in it, queer strands of green like braids.

"What is it?" said I.

"Nothing but weed," said she, with that slow, sleepy smile.

Somehow or other I felt calmer than I had any time. "Look here," said I. "I'm going to light this lamp." I took out a match, scratched it, and touched the third wick. The flame ran around, bigger than the other two together. But still her arms hung there. I bit my lip. "By God, I will!" said I to myself, and I lit the fourth.

It was fierce, sir, fierce! And yet those arms never trembled. I had to look around at her. Her eyes were still looking into mine, so deep and deep, and her red lips were still smiling with that queer sleepy droop; the only thing was that tears were raining down her cheeks—big, glowing round, jewel tears. It wasn't human, sir. It was like a dream.

"Pretty arms," she sighed, and then, as if those words had broken something in her heart, there came a great sob bursting from her lips. To hear it drove me mad. I reached to drag her away, but she was too quick, sir; she cringed from me and slipped out from between my hands. It was like she faded away, sir, and went down

in a bundle, nursing her poor arms and mourning over them with those terrible, broken sobs.

The sound of them took the manhood out of me —you'd have been the same, sir. I knelt down beside her on the floor and covered my face.

"Please," I moaned. "Please! Please!" That's all I could say. I wanted her to forgive me. I reached out a hand, blind, for forgiveness, and I couldn't find her anywhere. I had hurt her so, and she was afraid of me, of *me*, sir, who loved her so deep it drove me crazy.

I could see her down the stair, though it was dim and my eyes were filled with tears. I stumbled after her, crying, "Please! Please!" The little wicks I'd lit were blowing in the wind from the door and smoking the glass beside them black. One went out. I pleaded with them, the same as I would plead with a human being. I said I'd be back in a second. I promised. And I went on down the stair, crying like a baby because I'd hurt her, and she was afraid of me—of *me*, sir.

She had gone into her room. The door was closed against me and I could hear her sobbing beyond it, broken-hearted. My heart was broken too. I beat on the door with my palms. I begged her to forgive me. I told her I loved her. And all the answer was that sobbing in the dark.

And then I lifted the latch and went in, groping, pleading. "Dearest—please! Because I love you!"

I heard her speak down near the floor. There

wasn't any anger in her voice; nothing but sadness and despair.

"No," said she. "You don't love me, Ray. You never have."

"I do! I have!"

"No, no," said she, as if she was tired out.

"Where are you?" I was groping for her. I thought, and lit a match. She had got to the door and was standing there as if ready to fly. I went toward her, and she made me stop. She took my breath away. "I hurt your arms," said I, in a dream.

"No," said she, hardly moving her lips. She held them out to the match's light for me to look, and there was never a scar on them—not even that soft, golden down was singed, sir. "You can't hurt my body," said she, sad as anything. "Only my heart, Ray; my poor heart."

I tell you again, she took my breath away. I lit another match. "How can you be so beautiful?" I wondered.

She answered in riddles—but oh, the sadness of her, sir.

"Because," said she, "I've always so wanted to be."

"How come your eyes so heavy?" said I.

"Because I've seen so many things I never dreamed of," said she.

"How come your hair so thick?"

"It's the seaweed makes it thick," said she smiling queer, queer.

"How come seaweed there?"

"Out of the bottom of the sea."

She talked in riddles, but it was like poetry to hear her, or a song.

"How come your lips so red?" said I.

"Because they've wanted so long to be kissed."

Fire was on me, sir. I reached out to catch her, but she was gone, out of the door and down the stair. I followed, stumbling. I must have tripped on the turn, for I remember going through the air and fetching up with a crash, and I didn't know anything for a spell—how long I can't say. When I came to, she was there, somewhere, bending over me, crooning, "My love—my love—" under her breath like, a song.

But then when I got up, she was not where my arms went; she was down the stair again, just ahead of me. I followed her. I was tottering and dizzy and full of pain. I tried to catch up with her in the dark of the store-room, but she was too quick for me, sir, always a little too quick for me. Oh, she was cruel to me, sir. I kept bumping against things, hurting myself still worse, and it was cold and wet and a horrible noise all the while, sir; and then, sir, I found the door was open, and a sea had parted the hinges.

I don't know how it all went, sir. I'd tell you if I could, but it's all so blurred—sometimes it seems more like a dream. I couldn't find her any more; I couldn't hear her; I went all over, everywhere. Once, I remember, I found myself

hanging out of that door between the davits, looking down into those big black seas and crying like a baby. It's all riddles and blur. I can't seem to tell you much, sir. It was all—all—I don't know.

I was talking to somebody else—not her. It was the Inspector. I hardly knew it was the Inspector. His face was as gray as a blanket, and his eyes were bloodshot, and his lips were twisted. His left wrist hung down, awkward. It was broken coming aboard the Light in that sea. Yes, we were in the living-room. Yes, sir, it was daylight—gray daylight. I tell you, sir, the man looked crazy to me. He was waving his good arm toward the weather windows, and what he was saying, over and over, was this:

"*Look what you done, damn you! Look what you done!*"

And what I was saying was this:

"*I've lost her!*"

I didn't pay any attention to him, nor him to me. By and by he did, though. He stopped his talking all of a sudden, and his eyes looked like the devil's eyes. He put them up close to mine. He grabbed my arm with his good hand, and I cried, I was so weak.

"Johnson," said he, "is that it? By the living God—if you got a woman out here, Johnson!"

"No," said I. "I've lost her."

"What do you mean—lost her?"

"It was dark," said I—and it's funny how my head was clearing up—"and the door was open—the store-room door—and I was after her—and I guess she stumbled, maybe—and I lost her."

"Johnson," said he, "what do you mean? You sound crazy—downright crazy. Who?"

"Her," said I. "Fedderson's wife."

"*Who?*"

"Her," said I. And with that he gave my arm another jerk.

"Listen," said he, like a tiger. "Don't try that on me. It won't do any good—that kind of lies—not where *you're* going to. Fedderson and his wife, too—the both of 'em's drowned deader 'n a door-nail."

"I know," said I, nodding my head. I was so calm it made him wild.

"You're crazy! Crazy as a loon, Johnson!" And he was chewing his lip red. "I know, because it was me that found the old man laying on Back Water Flats yesterday morning—*me!* And she'd been with him in the boat, too, because he had a piece of her jacket tore off, tangled in his arm."

"I know," said I, nodding again, like that.

"You know *what,* you *crazy, murdering fool?*" Those were his words to me, sir.

"I know," said I, "what I know."

"And *I* know," said he, "what *I* know."

And there you are, sir. He's Inspector. I'm—nobody."

WHITE HORSE WINTER

THE little house where I was born, and in which I passed the earlier years of my life, stands about a hundred yards back from the beach and a little more than a mile down-shore from Old Harbor. What we always knew as the "Creek" runs in there, with plenty of water even at low tide to float my father's dory; and the flawless yellow face of a dune used to stand up behind the house, sheltering us from the northerlies that pick the scud from the ocean, a mile back across the Neck, and spatter it in the bay at our front door. My father and mother still live in the house, but the dune has shifted to the westward and it is colder there on a winter night.

My older sister was born before my father and mother came from the Western Islands, so she had a recollection of green country; but we younger children knew nothing but the water and the sand. Strangely enough, my most vivid remembrance of the water is not from any of its wilder moods. I picture it with the tide out at evening, reflecting the face of the western sky, flat, garish-colored, silent, with a spur of mute

fire reaching out at me along the surface of the Creek.

The dunes were the magic land, full of shifting shadows, and deceptive, where a little covey of beach-plums made themselves out as a far-away and impenetrable forest, especially when the mist came inland, and a footprint in the sand across a hollow appeared a vast convulsion of nature at the other end of a day's journey. And one felt the dunes always moving, rising up out of the sea, marching silently across the Neck, and advancing upon the little house. I can remember the spring when the sand ate up a pear-tree my father had brought from the Islands.

The dunes entered our lives and became a part of them. Even now the sight of a strip of sand gets a queer grip on me, and to this day I am apt to catch myself spying out the sky-line with an indefinable and portentous dread. I cannot shake off this sensation, although I know perfectly what it is. It is a relic from that time which we have always called, in our family, White Horse Winter.

I remember my father's coming in one October day and standing a long time before the barometer which always hung behind the kitchen door. After a while he said to my mother, in his broken English,—

"It weel be ver' bad weather to-night—to-morrow."

That night when I was trying to get to sleep

I heard the skirmishers of a great wind feeling at the shingles above my head.

My next recollection is of the tumult of a gale outside, mingled with beating on the door downstairs, and distracted fragments of men's voices calling to one another of a vessel come ashore. I knew it must be at Round Hill or they would not have come past our house.

Then I was out myself, where no boy of ten had any business to be, isolated in the center of a vast disruption, except when an occasional agitated phantom passed in the rocking darkness toward Round Hill Bars. I had an acute consciousness of doing wrong, and with all the fight to keep my feet in the chaos of sand and wind and scud, the thought of what my father would do if he came upon me lay heavy on my mind.

After a time one of the shore-dunes came up before me, black, with an aura of distracted sand about its crest and the sky behind it gray with the labor of dawn. The silhouettes of men, and of a few women, were running about over it and pointing to sea with jerking arms. But I was afraid to go up there—still with the fear of my father's anger—so I ran to the northward in the hollow a hundred yards or so before I felt it safe to venture upon the ridge, where I cowered down, a very small and very tired-out boy.

It was a full-rigged ship. Her main and mizzen were already gone, and her foremast writhed in dismal and contorted circles toward the sky, a

frail, sensitive needle-point marking every onslaught and repulse of the fight below, where the vessel wallowed in the smother between the outer and inner bars. Inshore, on the torn and clamorous beach, the figures of the life-saving crew moved about their boat with futile gestures, lifting curved hands to their faces to scream soundless words at one another. The wind was like a blast from the colossal explosion that flared behind the eastern clouds.

But it was the water that fascinated me that morning. The Round Hill Bars make a talking, even in a moderate breeze, which can be heard in our kitchen across the Neck. Now their shouting seemed to me to fill up the whole bowl of the visible world, rumbling around its misty confines in tangled reverberations. I could see the outer bar only as a white, distorted line athwart the gray, but the shoreward shallows were writhing, living things, gnawing at the sky with venomous teeth of spume, and giving birth in agony to the legions which advanced forever and forever upon the land.

My mother used sometimes to sing a little Portuguese song to my brother Antone, the baby. It had a part which ran—

> The herd of the Sea King's White Horses
> Comes up on the shore to graze . . .

It pleased my boy mind on this morning to figure them as ravening, stung to frenzy by the

lash of the gale, tossing maddened manes, and bellowing—for horses were not common in that fisher country. Try as I might, my eyes would not stay on the wreck, but returned inevitably to those squadrons of white horses advancing out of the mist. They were very fearsome things to me at that time, although I was old enough to know that they were not alive and could not possibly get at me.

Then a tremendous wave broke and flattened out in a smother on the beach, and I was sure for a moment I had seen an actual horse struggling there. The next breaker overwhelmed the place, swirling, thunderous, shot its thin mottled tongue far up the sand and withdrew it seething into the undertow—and now there could be no doubt that a horse was there, screaming, pawing at the treacherous sand, his wide, glistening back horribly convulsed, and eyes and nostrils of flame.

Many and many a time since then I have had it all in a dream; and in the dream, even now, I am swept back into something of the elemental terror that held the boy cowering on the ridge of sand while the great white stallion staggered up the face of the dune and stood against the sky, coughing and coughing and coughing.

Of a sudden, I knew that I must run away from that thing, and I scrambled out of my little burrow and ran, not daring to look back, not daring to ease my pace when the sand dragged too cruelly at my shoes—ran and ran—till I found

myself in the safe heaven of the front room at the little house, and my mother stirring a pan over the kitchen stove.

I staggered out to her, crying that a horse had come out of the water and run after me. She thought that I was feverish, had had a bad dream, and it occurred to me that I need not let her know I had been where I should not have been that morning. She packed me off to bed again, and when I woke in the afternoon I was of even minds myself whether I had dreamed it all or not. Certainly it was cut from the cloth of a dream.

During the weeks that followed I heard a deal about the wreck, from my father and from others who came past on the state road, and stopped to chat. It was a bad affair, that wreck. The shore people could see her men, now and then when the rack drifted aside for a moment, swarming over the deck like ants disturbed by a pail of water. One of these glimpses showed them the crew clustered about the boats on the lee side, and then the life-savers burned in vain the signal which means, "Do not attempt to leave in your own boats"; the next lifting of the curtain discovered the ship's decks bare of life, and seventeen bodies were dragged from the surf that day.

But a strange thing happened when the life-savers rowed out to the hulk after the sea had gone down. In the cabin they came upon a young man, dry-clothed, sitting before a fire in the stove, plainly much shaken by the ex-

periences of the night, but still with a grip on himself. He asked if the boats had come ashore all right, and when Captain Hall told him, he seemed taken aback.

"Nothing come ashore?" he asked.

"Nothing alive," said the captain. The other looked into the fire awhile, white and shaking a little.

"I was afeared to go with the sailors," he said, after a time.

Of course the story did not come to me in this straight sequence, but merely as haphazard snatches from the gossip of my elders, some of it not clearly till years afterward—for the details of a great wreck are treasured among people of the sea as long as the generation lasts.

It was almost a week before I went out on the dunes again. Although I was now convinced that I had seen something that was not, still even a bad dream is not a thing for a child to shake off lightly. But my sister Agnes's eighteenth birthday was coming soon now, and it was always a custom in our family to signalize such events with a cake and bayberry candles. So I was off this day to the north of Snail Road, where the bottom of a certain hollow is covered with a mat of bayberry bushes. It takes a good many bayberries to make even a small candle, and the dark was beginning to come down when the basket was filled and I started back across the sand-hills toward home.

The dunes were very silent and very misty and very lonely that evening; I trudged along with my small head going about like the mythical owl's, but the dusk remained empty of any horror till I had come across Snail Road and into the region of black sand where one may scoop out a little hole and drink fresh water. I almost always did this, whether I was thirsty or not, but that night I was saved the trouble of scooping the hole—or would have been had I cared to take advantage of the great glistening gash that lay in my path. It was no work of human hands. All about the place the sand was churned and scarred by enormous, deep tracks, and a double thread of them led away over the eastern skyline. Then I was running again, as I had that other morning, running all the way to the little house, careless of the bayberries that strewed my backward trail.

Two nights after, we were all sitting around the fire in our kitchen. There was no wind that evening and the tide was down beyond the flats, so that all was very quiet outside the little house, and a note of distant trumpeting came plain to us through the crisp night. It was surely a queer sound for our country, but its significance passed me till my father spoke to my mother.

"It's the white horse again," he said.

My mother nodded, without curiosity or surprise. "Yes," she answered. "We must keep Zhoe"—that was I, Joe—"off the dunes more."

But they could not keep me off the dunes entirely, now that the white horse had become actual and an object of common gossip. I took an adventurous pleasure in climbing to the top of the hill behind the house and overlooking the country of hummocks. Especially was this fine to do of an early evening, when the light had left the sand and the ridges stood out black against the sky.

I saw him many times from this point of security—always as a dark, far-away silhouette, tremendous, laboring over the back of a dune or standing with his great head flung up and tail streaming on the wind. His presence there gave the whole dune-land a new aspect for me—as of a familiar country grown sinister and full of the shadow of disaster. Nights when the wind was northerly, his racketing sometimes came to me in the loft where my cot stood; then I would shiver under the clothes and fall asleep to dream of being lost in a wilderness of shifting dunes, and that great, shaggy, white beast above me on a ridge, coughing and coughing and coughing. Once he must have come plunging down the face of our own hill, because we were startled by a splashing of sand on the shingles of an outhouse, followed by a great snorting and a ripping of fence timbers. That night even my father and mother were pale.

For I was not the only one who was afraid. Some of the men came out from Old Harbor

with lines one day to take the animal, and at first sight of him, suddenly, over the angle of a dune, dropped their entanglements and fled back past our house, running heavily. And that was in the flat sunlight of midday. After that men went over to Round Hill Station by other and circuitous routes.

One of these evenings, while I was crouching on the hill with a delightful shiver playing along my spine, a strange man came up and stood a few yards to one side of me, looking out to the eastward. The white horse was there, perhaps a half-mile off, outlined against a bank of silver that came rolling in from the ocean. The newcomer regarded him a long time without moving; then I, being a little afraid of the man, slipped out of the bushes and down the hill to the little house.

The dusk was already thick when he came down the dune and stopped to pass a word with my father, who was working over a net near the gate. I remember my sister Agnes peering curiously at the figure indistinct in the gloom, and my mother whispering to her that it was the man they had taken off the wreck. That made a tremendous impression on me. I was glad when my father asked him to sit awhile by the fire.

From my vantage-point behind my mother's chair, I could examine him better than I dared do on the ridge. He was a smallish man, of a wiry

build rather uncommon among our own people, whose strength is apt to come upon them with an amount of flesh. His skin was not brown, but red, hairy about the wrists—I thought of it as brittle. His hair was almost the color of his skin; his features were heavy. He sat or stood with elbows out and thumbs tucked in his belt, and he had little to say. I can give his age definitely as twenty-eight at that time.

From the moment he entered, the stranger seemed unable to keep his slow-moving gray eyes away from my sister Agnes, who stood leaning against the door which led into the front room. Those two were as far apart as the two poles. It is hard for a small boy to know how his brothers and sisters really appear, but looking back out of later years I remember her as rather tall for a girl, full-formed, straight, dark as the rest of us, and with a look of contempt in her black eyes for this alien whom she had no means of comprehending.

For a time my father talked about the wreck, putting questions, hazarding technical opinions in the jargon of the sea. The stranger's replies were monosyllabic and vague. Then in a pause the neighing of the white horse came in to us, and the man started up with an abrupt scraping of his shoes on the boards. I am sure that Agnes believed he was frightened and that she took no pains to hide it. After that the talk turned naturally on the white horse, going back and forth

between my father and mother, for the stranger had even less to say now than before.

Jem Hodges (that was the stranger's name) came the following day and sat on the front porch, watching father, who was tarring weir twine in the yard. He had nothing to say—simply sat there with his thumbs tucked in his belt. Agnes came in and said to my mother:

"He's a dummy—I never seen such a dummy, ma."

"I don' know, Aggie," my mother answered her. "He ain't our kind, an' you can't tell about things you ain't used to."

That was my mother's way.

Agnes flounced out of the kitchen in a manner which had no significance to me then, for my rudimentary wits could perceive no possible connection between her action and the silence of the little man on the porch outside.

I think I can say now what the connection was. Among other things the world has taught me this—that no two men do the same thing in exactly the same way. Jem Hodges was wooing my sister Agnes. Little wonder that her spirit was restive under that wooing, when all the blood of the race in her veins sang of the lover's fervor, the quick eye, the heart speaking in words, the abandon of caresses. And here was a man, fulfilling none of our conventions of beauty, who sat imperturbable, impassive, saying nothing, and making her come to him. I am sure that he

did it without planning or analyzing—I think half of it was constraint and all of it instinct. And Agnes might flounce out of the room as she would; sooner or later I saw her again at the front of the house.

This went on for two or three weeks. Jem Hodges came almost every day to sit on the porch awhile, after which he sometimes wandered away in the growing evening over our own dune. Again and again I saw him standing there, as on the first evening, for a long time without motion, looking over the hummocks. Sometimes I could hear him whistling under his breath an air that was very strange and outlandish to me, then, who had never heard the like. Many years later I heard one of the great tenors of the world sing the same air, and it thrilled me, but not in the same way.

On the evening of the 28th of November (I have the date from Agnes) I was ensconced in my bushy retreat, watching the night take hold of the world of sand. Jem Hodges stood on the ridge to the east of me. Every minute that passed robbed his motionless figure of some detail and lent to it a portion of the flat mystery of the night. I had seen the white horse once that evening, topping a rise far off to the northward, and then no more till I was suddenly aware of a gigantic, indistinct form moving up-hill toward me amid a vast *shuf-shuf* of troubled sand.

I was terribly frightened for the instant; then

I knew it was only a matter of hopping over the bank behind me and sliding down to the very back door of the little house. I had slipped from the bushes and was almost to the bottom of the smothering slope when I heard such a plunging in the sand above that my wits came near leaving me again. I made wild and futile plunges, and cried out to my sister, whom I saw in the open doorway. I had no thought in the world but that it was the white horse charging down. I had almost gained the house, a pathetic small figure of panic, when I felt myself brushed aside with a violence which left me sprawling, terrified, on my back in the sand, with a confused impression as of something passing through the doorway where my sister had stood. It was not beyond me at that moment to imagine the white horse, overcarried by the impetus of his charge, blundering right on into the kitchen of the little house.

Jem Hodges had passed completely out of my mind, and it was Jem whom I found in the kitchen, ill at ease, confronted by my sister. Agnes I hardly knew that evening—she was like a new and strange person, aflame with anger and a high, emphatic beauty, speaking tensely, with the nerve-twanging upward slur at the end of the phrase which discovered the blood of the Island race through all the veneer of public school. The accumulated unrest of weeks had found a vent at last.

"You—you— Oh, you coward!" she reviled

him, "you little sneaking coward, you!—an' they call you a *man!*" Her voice was a whispered shriek, her clenched hands moved before her as though to do him harm.

Jem was white and still breathing hard.

"A man," Agnes went on, "they call you a man—an' you knock over little children so's you can save your own little hairy hide. You lose your eyesight—an' your mind—from seein' a horse walkin' over some sand. Agh!"

Then she turned to me with a fierce gesture of protection.

"Zhoe—poor little Zhoe—he hurt you, didn't he? There, don't cry no more. You're more of a man 'n he is, ain't you, little Zhoe?"

My face was in the folds of her skirt and I still sobbed out the after-swell of the terror, but I could hear Jem's voice speaking. When talking, he always seemed to me to be expending his words with immense care.

"The horse wouldn't harm Joe," he pronounced.

That was a signal for Agnes to fly at him once more.

"No!—won't harm him. You slip that out easy because Zhoe's no folks of yourn—an' never will be, either. Agh!—God!—I could kill you if you weren't such a worm!"

"He wouldn't harm Joe nor nobody."

The man's words were unsteady, but assured. Agnes's voice went from her control completely.

She came close to him and screamed in his face:

"Harm nobody? Oh! Oh! Little man, go an' bring me that white horse! You been makin' eyes at me. Oh, I seen 'em! Now if you want me—*me*—go out an' get the white horse that won't harm nobody—with your two bare hands—an' bring him to me."

For that moment my sister was out of her mind.

Jem came over and laid an absent hand on my shoulder, as if he had thought to comfort me, and then had fallen into abstraction before the act was accomplished. After a moment of vacant quiet he looked up at Agnes.

"An' you tell me that, too?" he said.

All that evening I was haunted by a picture of the silent man, with his hard red thumbs tucked in his belt, pursuing a shadow of horror through the black dune country. This distressed me so much that I finally crawled out from beneath the table, where I had been lying, and whispered my fears in my sister's ear. She had been very quiet all evening, but when she understood what I was saying she gave a little bitter laugh and put her arm around me.

"Don't be a-feared, Zhoe," she whispered her answer. "The little man is tight behind his own door this night." Then she fell to brooding once more.

When Jem came to the little house the following

day he carried a piece of line in one hand. He sat down as usual on the front steps. The picture of him that evening has remained to me the most vivid memory of my young days—why, I cannot say. I peeped out of the front window and saw him there, silhouetted against the blazing waters of the bay—the vast, silent and expressive shout of the departing day casting out at me the unexpressive man.

Agnes came around a corner and stood looking down at the line in Jem's hand. He looked down at it, too.

"I been thinkin' it over," he said.

"You're a-scared to do it!" she answered.

For a long time they remained there without moving or speaking, both looking down at the line.

"You're a-scared to do it!" Agnes repeated, at length, and Jem got up from the steps and went out through the gate toward the dunes. Never have I seen the whole world so saturated with passive flame as it seemed to me, peering from the gloom of the front room that evening.

At supper Agnes talked feverishly of many things, but ate nothing. All of us noticed it, and my mother remarked upon it. The silence outside was so complete that the riffle of the coming tide was audible in the pauses, and once I heard the note of the stallion far away over the sand. Then my sister broke out into a humming tune—the first and last time I ever knew her to sing at

table. I remember wondering why her eyes, which were usually so steady and straight-seeing, turned here and there without rest, and why, after the meal, she wandered from window to window, and never stopped to look out at any.

That was to be a gala-night for me. My father had been raking up the brush and leaves about the place for a week, heaping them, together with bits of old net and tarry shreds of canvas, in half a dozen piles before the house, and to-night I was allowed to set them off. I had them blazing soon after supper was over, and a fine monstrous spectacle they made for me, who danced up and down the lines full of elemental exultation, and then ran off to call Agnes to see my handiwork.

I could not find her anywhere in the house. I went through all the rooms and out and around the yard. No one knew where she was. My mother thought she had seen her with a shawl over her head, but had taken no particular notice at the time. It didn't matter, at any rate—Agnes often wandered out toward town in the early evening.

The rest of us sat on the steps and watched the fires, baby brother and all, but they had lost something of their enchantment for me. I was pursuing an idea, an obscure apprehension.

"I b'lieve Aggie's gone to the dunes," I proclaimed, at length.

"Dunes!" my mother cried out. "No,—you're foolish, Zhoe. Why?"

Thus confronted by the direct question, I found my reasonings too diaphanous for a logical answer.

"I dunno," I mumbled, abashed.

But I had set them worrying. It is a strange fact that fisher-folk are at once the bravest and the most apprehensive people I have any knowledge of. When worried my mother was generally restless with her hands, while my father betrayed his anxiety by unwonted profanity and by aimless expeditions to inspect the dory mooring in the creek.

These things they did to-night, my mother on the steps, impassive save for her writhing fingers, my father visible in peripatetic red glimpses as he wandered, muttering, about the yard. He called out that he was going to step down and take a look at the boat.

After that he was gone a long time—half an hour I should say—while the flames died down over the fires, replacing the uncertain flicker in the yard with a smooth, pervasive glow. When he at length reappeared I wondered to see sand-burs clinging about the edges of his trousers. The nearest sand-burs I knew of were half a mile off toward Snail Road.

I don't know how long we waited after that. My mother put the baby to bed, and returned to sit with restless hands; my father, muttering curses the while, added bits of driftwood to the

fires, with the instinct inbred in sea-people of keeping a beacon alight.

Their coming was as the coming of an apparition seen suddenly in the firelight, tottering forward on limbs too frail for its inexplicable and uncouth frame. Then my mother cried out, and my father's oath was a prayer, and it came to me that the apparition was not one, but two figures, one bearing the other.

Jem staggered up between the fires and laid his burden down with her head in my mother's lap. My sister's face was a queer color; her eyes were closed. I was bewildered and afraid.

"Scared," Jem panted. He collapsed rather than sat upon the lowest step "He never touched her—just scared her—out of her head."

None of us doubted for an instant who "he" was. I ran into the kitchen under my mother's order for water. She worked with a sort of feverish calm over the girl in her lap, while Jem sat, head in hands and back heaving. After a little he got up and regarded my sister's face.

"She'll come round," he said.

It may have been a question. If it was, the answer was at its heels.

Agnes's eyes opened at the sound of the words —opened with a shadow of unutterable horror behind them. Her hands went out to him in an agony of rigid appeal. Jem knelt down with an arm about her shoulders.

"You're all right," he comforted her, still expending his words, as it were, with care.

"He came out of the sand—right up out of the sand at me." There was a certain queer quality of raving in Agnes's whisper. She clung to him with the impossible strength of terror. "He came out of the sand. His eyes were red—oh, red!—I could see them—and—an' I couldn't run—couldn't step—not step—"

"Yes—yes. Home now, Miss Aggie," Jem's red hand was on her hair, soothing, as one might a child.

"How did I come here?" She put the question abruptly, in her own voice now; took her arms from his neck with a gesture of shame and laid them across my mother's shoulders.

It was my mother who answered her query. "Meester Hodges bring you, Aggie girl."

Agnes's eyes went to the little man, but he was lost in abstract contemplation of the nearest fire-bed.

My mother went on, "Ain't you goin' to thank Meester Hodges, Aggie?"

Jem turned at that, lifting an imperative hand.

"Wait!" said he. "Wait! You told me—to bring the horse."

Agnes cried out: "No!—no! Oh, please—"

"You told me. Wait—an' don't be afeared."

He leaned against a post of the railing, his red skin seeming to take to itself all the dying light of the embers, and began to whistle, low at first,

then filling out clear and high and throbbing. He whistled in a peculiar way which I have never observed in any other.

The air was half familiar to me, the one he had played with softly on the dune behind the house. But to me and to my people, bred to the cloying accents of the South, that clear, soaring, sweet thread of Northern melody came as strange and alien and tingling, filling our own familiar night with a quality of expectancy. Jem Hodges was a new man before our eyes. For the first time in our knowledge of him he was giving utterance to himself. He swept through the melody once and twice, and paused.

"He's far," he said, and a note of whickering came to us from the eastward dunes. He caught up the air again, playing with it wonderful things, sweeping the little huddled family of us out of our intimate house and glowing, familiar yard, into a strange, wind-troubled country of his own.

And this time it was the night, not the sea, that gave up the great white stallion, rising to our fence in majestic flight, exploding from the flat darkness.

Jem cried: "No!—no! Don't be afeared!" for we were making the gestures of panic.

The animal came to him, picking a dainty way about the coals for all his tremendous weight, making a wonderfully fine picture with the fiery sheen over his vast, deep chest, along the glis-

tening flanks where the sweat stood, turning the four white fetlocks to agitated pinions of flame. Thus, I believe, the horses of the gods came to the ancients.

He stood over us there, heaving mountainous, filling half the sphere of our sight. But his nose was in the bosom of Jem Hodges's coat, and his ears pricked forward to the breathing of Jem Hodges's song without words. The little man wandered on and on, picking a phrase from here and from there, wooing, recounting, laughing, exulting, weeping, never hating. When he suddenly began to speak in words, it was as though he had come down a great way, out of his own element.

"It had to be—after all," he said. "After all. Now I suppose I've got to take you on to the rich American leddy? She'll keep you fine—in a fine paddock—you—you of the big wide moorlands—free gentleman of half an English county. Ah, it's bad, Baron boy—"

Then he was talking to us—to Agnes.

"I been lyin' to myself—tryin' to make myself believe Baron was away off and wild. I wanted to have him free, like the air—long as he could. The rich leddy will pay five hundred pounds. Why do I need it? We're comfortable on our little place at home. Why? Because father says so—an' a man must do what his father says—till he gets a wife an' family of his own. I thought Baron was gone when the ship got wrecked. I

was near glad of it. He's no boy to pen up—in a paddock—with a ribbon on, mebby. An' when I knew he wasn't gone—why—I fair couldn't do it—put it off an' off an' off. Ah, Baron, Baron, they gave me you when I could pick you up in the meadow; but a man's got to do what his father says till—"

He fell to musing, then, running his hand over the broad forehead, combing out the silk of the forelock, caressing a fine ear. Then, as if to himself:

"Till he gets a wife of his own!"

He spoke to my sister.

'Come here, Miss Aggie."

Agnes went to him, and at his command laid her fingers on Baron's nose. The animal arched his great neck—oh, an indescribable gesture!—and mouthed the back of her hand. I thought of Agnes at that moment as the bravest girl in all the world. Agnes was a stranger to me that night.

After a little time my mother got up, saying that I ought to have been in my bed long ago. My father came in with us, so that we left only the white horse and my sister and Jem Hodges standing in a black group against the glow of the fires.

DOWN ON THEIR KNEES

SI NICKERSON'S Lane! Had the ghost of that Old Harbor whaler come back to his native street, amazement must have moved his phantom features. The little houses scrambling up its length, once so drab and austere, seemed to have gone mad with their pinks and yellows and emeralds. The babies under the grape-vines were brown as shoes, and so were the old women, bright-kerchiefed, gossiping across the fences in a tongue he had heard, perhaps, when he used to put in at the Azores for water and green stuff, but never here. Manta's, Silva's, Cabral's, on the mail-boxes—and in the Nickerson house at the top, antique and white-pillared, lived now a Portuguese Peter—Peter Um Perna—as one would say, Peter One-leg. The ghostly visitant might have dropped a tear at all this, or, a philosopher, he might have turned his hollow eyes on Angel Avellar, making lace behind the pink palings of her grandmother's yard, and, murmuring, "For of such is the kingdom of the future," gone back to his grave.

Angel's grandmother had to walk with a stick,

she was so old; an absurd, dried-up person with a topknot the size of a thimble, bad knees, arms like broom-handles and a hundred times as tough and never thoroughly dry. At almost any time of the day, or of the year, they might have been seen in the yard or the shed, stabbing in and out of the washtub, furious, uncontrollable, thrashing the suds about at one end and the thin old woman at the other. One wondered if she never rebelled at them. Perhaps she did. They washed for a good many people, among them Peter Um Perna; and the One-leg, since he had become so rich, changed his shirt every other day when he was ashore from his vessel.

At any rate, other folks rebelled; it made them nervous to see her work so long and so hard. But when they demanded across their fences why she would put none of it on that "lazy piece of an Angelina," she made no answer beyond tapping her nose reflectively with a dripping finger-bone. Or perhaps she might be hanging out one of Peter Um Perna's shirts, and pause to stare at it with an odd, preoccupied attention. Or again, if the vessels chanced to be coming in that day, she might hobble into the house and, finding Angel reading on the sofa, pet her lustrous hair, mumble and smile, and say, "Y'r lace, Pretty, out 'n the garden," or perhaps, "The flowe's needs pickin', Pretty."

Peter Um Perna made his men carry him ashore on their shoulders when his vessel came

back from the fishing-grounds. Had a drop of water touched his single russet shoe there is no saying what would have happened. They hated him as no other skipper was hated; yet he was a lucky man to go with, a "dog" for knowing the fish, and it was a sight to see them coming up Nickerson's Lane after a "big trip," in their boots and hard, round rubber hats, loitering and shuffling so as to let him keep his wooden-legged lead of them, and bellowing across the yards of how many fish they had taken and how many dollars they had shared.

Um Perna said nothing; there was no need. He stumped along in front with his hat pulled down to hide the scar on his forehead, one thumb tucked over the gold watch-chain, the other preening his black mustache. One would think he had forgotten there were other people in the world, for he turned his eyes neither to the right nor to the left, not even when he passed the pink-fenced yard where Angel Avellar always chanced to be, picking flowers, perhaps, or reaching up her brown, well-rounded arms to tuck a vine-tendril in place, or perhaps sitting with her head bent over her lace-hooks, the hair hiding her face except for an edge of cheek, deep-colored under the eyes of Um Perna's men—especially of Man'el Costa. For saying his name over to herself, or even thinking of Man'el, made Angel's cheeks hot this autumn of her seventeenth year.

Folks laughed at Angel for sitting out of doors when the flowers were all gone and the grass-plot dried up. But it was on one of these afternoons, with the sun as low as a man's head and a cold wind spattering sand among the roofs, that Man'el Costa leaned his ditty-bag on the palings and asked Angel to go to the St. Michels' dance with him.

"What y' say?" he urged. His soft, dark cheeks grew darker still at the snickers of his mates behind him.

Angel wanted to laugh and to weep at the same time. She could not have lifted her eyes if a hundred red-hot needles had pricked her. Man'el Costa! Man'el Costa! If she could only so much as nod her head? Her heart jumped up and choked her; Man'el was turning away, not understanding. She must, somehow, get to her feet.

"M-m-man'el!" she stammered, her face stricken with fire.

It was not Man'el there facing her, but Peter Um Perna himself, who had waved Man'el away. He looked her over at his leisure.

"What's y'r name?" he inquired, with a faint sneer. When he saw the girl trembling and quite unable to answer, the sneer broadened.

"I guess that's one o' my good shirts dryin' on the line there. Better bring it to my house after supper, whatever y'r name is, because I'll want to wear it to-morrow."

Angel got into the house somehow. At first, on the front-room sofa, even the tears refused to come, she was so bruised and robbed. Man'el had not understood, and he would never ask her again, and there were so many girls. By and by the world grew warmer and blacker, and she could sob till she was worn out to her finger-tips, and Avo Avellar's hand on hers in the gloom was something holding her up from the deep. The Avo began to croon after a time, a curious mumbling overtone of exultation.

"I hear 'im, Pretty. I was behind the curtain. Y' don't know men yit, or y' wouldn't take on so. 'Ain't he spoke to y'u, Pretty? He claims t' hate women, an' yit he's spoke t' my Pretty. Dry y'r tears, dearie. Didn't y' hear he wanted y' should bring the wash t'-night? This Peter wants t' see my Pretty again, does he? Hee-hee-hee-hee!"

It was so hard for tired Angel to understand. What was the Avo talking about? Turning over, she stared at the shadowy ceiling, her eyes growing wider and wider, and her wrists cold, as if in an ice-pack.

"Who you mean?" she whispered. "Not—not the One-leg, Avo!"

"Yis, the One-leg, Pretty. The One-leg that lives in the big house up there and pays four dollars f'r a shirt, they tell, up to Boston. If more men was to git a leg catched into a jibin' boom—what a world—what a world! Mebby

they'd all git mad then, an' proud, an' mebby own their three good vessels same 's Peter. A touch o' gold that was, Pretty. He's the same 's the rest of 'em afore that—remember? And to-day—to-day, he's spoke to Angel Avellar. Come, lay out y'r Sunday frock while I git the supper ready. Hee-hee—"

She hobbled off, bubbling over her stick, to rattle her supper pots in the kitchen. The illumination from the doorway lay across the carpet; Angel, turning on her side, watched the shadow crossing and re-crossing the bright patch, huge and misshapen and curiously agile.

"Was *that* the reason why she always sent me out into the yard then?" It was an astounding question, heavy and bitter and dark, made up, as it were, of all the questions of all the young girls standing on the thresholds of all the ages. It seemed impossible for her to go out into the light, but she had to when the Avo called.

"I don't want t'—t' take the wash," she pleaded, bending her head lower over the cod-cheek chowder. Abashed by the unexpected silence, she hazarded a peep through her lashes. The old woman began to laugh with a shrill, angry sarcasm, throwing one skinny arm over her head like a dancing-girl.

"Oh yis, yis! *I* go! That's what y' want? I'm so strong an' straight an' pretty. I heave my stick in the pig-yard an' skip like Tony Button's goat—an' who knows if Peter One-leg won't

ast me for his wife. Ahhh! Hee-hee-hee!" She dropped her irony in a wink for a kind of wrinkled tenderness. "Ah, my Pretty—I f'rgit my Pretty's a little girl yit. But you won't be nervous now, will you? I was same 's that when I was young, too; I shivered and cried when I was lucky—same 's you, Pretty. It 'll be all right. You go 'long. Go 'long! Here, le'me fix y'r hair a second. Y'r dress is pretty. Pretty dress!"

When Angel went up the lane, carrying the bundle on her head, all the little houses with their bright eyes crowded close to watch her pass, and the moon sent a ramping, shameless shadow ahead to drag her slow feet along. The austere autumnal wind shamed her, making nothing of her Sunday frock and stinging her with its blast till she would have turned and run down again had it not been for a wisp of arm waving her on from the familiar shadows below.

Peter's sister Philomena opened the back door slightly, almost before Angel could knock. Philomena was a narrow-chested, niggardly, black-clothed creature, standing forever on the brink of disaster. Her brother's affluence, his three vessels, even this house, remained incredible to her, a golden spell to be shattered by a breath of skepticism. She never spent money without a haunting fear lest the shopman chance to bite the coin and find it dust. She gave Angel no time to speak.

"*I* know what y'r after," she challenged, squeezing her tall, chalky face in the crack. "Na-na—we don't want you snoopin' round here. Go 'way!" But when Angel, unspeakably relieved, turned to go, the woman was out, plucking at her elbow with frightened fingers. "Na-na—come in! I s'pose you got to come in. Oh, dear me—my brother Peter—"

Peter Um Perna sat in front of a base-burner in the living-room, his wooden peg side by side with his russet shoe, and both of a color in the glow from the door, his hands folded across his white waistcoat, and his head sunken forward in a pose of meditation or perhaps fatigue.

"Oh yes," he murmured, hearing Angel behind him. He kept her standing in a torment of uncertainty, neither offering to rise himself nor asking her to sit. "What's y'r name?" This was one of his finest thrusts, to seem not to know one's name.

"Angeline," the girl stammered, keeping her eyes on a dim Virgin and dimmer Child between the long windows, blue with the moon, so she would not have to look at him. "Angel—Angel Avellar, s-s-sir!"

"Angel, eh?" The scar on his forehead gathered up all the light and burned like a crooked beacon. "Not a bad name," he mused. "You must 've just come t' Old Harbor; I never seen you before t'-day."

His face did not change at this quite wanton

lie, but the girl's did in a curious way. Perhaps, after all, there is as true a travail when the child gives birth to the woman as is the woman's giving birth to the child. Hitching his bad leg over the good, the man became engrossed in its shining metal tip.

"You'll hear folks talkin' about me before you been here long, Angel. That's the name, ain't it? All of 'em talks about me because I'm so good to 'em an' because I'm so handsome. It's my gold foot catches their eye. Look! Won't see another foot in Old Harbor shines like that in the light. Brass, eh? Might 's well be gold. Then they like the rose-mark on my forehead. The saints 've got haloes, remember."

Half turning of a sudden, he clapped his hands together, crying: "Come, come! Stand over here where I can take a look at you. Mmm. That's better." He stared her over slowly from head to foot, one hand busy preening his mustache, the other slapping nervously on the chair-arm. "I'm thinkin' o' gittin' married one o' these days." He paused to watch the color sweeping the girl's face. There was a light in his eyes of an inexplicable glee. "Yes, I'm goin' t' git a woman when I can find the kind I want, or I won't have 'er. Her hair won't be black, either, but the color o' gold, and curly, and her eyes the color o' sky. She'll be lighter color all told 'n you are, an' not near so lean—and rich! She'll keep a girl t' do up her hair, and a man jus' to black

her shoes. An' she'll come crawlin' on her knees for me t' marry 'er, this woman."

Angel could not understand. She had no way of defending herself against this singular and meaningless brutality. The man seemed amused at her horror and her pathetic, inarticulate passion. He carried on in a shrill mood.

"*You* oughtn't to have no trouble gettin' a man, now. You're good enough aplenty for some poor devil, like a young fellow in my vessel now; I forget his name—Man'el somethin'. Now why don't y' go to work an' get out 'n the yard when the vessels comes in? Mebby this boy might happen t' see you an' take a fancy. Who knows? He may like 'em lean an' black, an' he poor, too. . . . That's all! You c'n go now!" He shook his hands at her with an unaccountable ferocity. "D'y' hear? You c'n *go!* Mena! *Mena!* Where 'n the devil— Why don't y' let this girl out?"

Man'el Costa was waiting outside Peter Um Perna's gate, rather heroic in the moonlight, leaning against a tree-bole and wondering how he should hail Angel Avellar, for he had seen her going in with the wash. Man'el was not used to girls quite so timid as Angel; he found it rather exciting, and the feeling deepened the natural fire of his eyes and whipped his fine dark cheeks with red.

"Oh, hello there!" he called, suddenly, catching sight of a figure at the gate. "What's the hurry,

Angel? What's—what's eatin' you?" he finished, bewildered to find his hands imprisoned and Angel's eyes shining close with a light he could not fathom.

"Was you waitin' for me, Man'el?"

"Yeh!" He had planned to lie about that.

"Come, let's go. Quick, Man'el, let's go!"

She tugged at his hand, and he followed a few steps down the hill, peering sidewise. It was like a dream, with the weird illumination and the wind and the naked vine-stems shivering among the yards. And this was Angel Avellar! He felt foolish, never to have seen through her before, and at the same time filled with a wild chill of discovery.

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly, tugging her to stop. "What you laughin' for?" And then, still more uncertain, "What—what you cryin' for, or are you laughin', anyway?"

The girl's hands, pressed against her bosom, rose and fell as though she had been running.

"Will you kill that one-leg pig, Man'el?"

"Sure!" He concluded that she was laughing, after all.

"*Now?*"

Man'el's jaw gave way. It was more than ever like a dream; he began to wish he could wake up so as to be certain of it, and then go on dreaming again. The night below gave up a shape waving ecstatic arms and screeching: "Go 'way f'm here. Git away f'm my girl! Go 'way—go home!"

They paid her no more attention than they would have paid an unseasonable insect bumbling in the night or the faint surf on the beaches.

"*Now?* Will you *now?*" Angel's eyes held him inexorably.

"W-e-l-l—ugh! *Say*, look here, what's eatin' you t'-night? What's *he* done to you? *Say*, can't y' talk sensible?"

Angel's fingers plucked at his coat lapels.

"Listen! Did I ever ask him to talk about me? Did I? Did I ask him to say if I was pretty or ugly? An' if he likes yellow hair, what's that to *me?* Oh! *oh!* If I was rich and had yellow hair, than I c'd come crawlin' on my knees to 'im, could I? Oh! As if anybody 'd look at that cripple pig! Did I ask 'im if I was ugly? *Oh! Oh! Oh!*"

Man'el threw back his head to laugh at the stars, relieved.

"So you're ugly, eh? Ugly?" He put something out of the way with his strong arm, crying: "Leave us be, old woman. Can't y' see we're talkin'? . . . Ugly, eh? Well, I'm on'y a poor fellow, but if *you're* ugly, then I want a ugly one. You're good enough for me—plenty good enough for me! Well, I should guess!"

"Don't say it that way!" she protested, fiercely. "*Not that way!*"

"Any way y' like, then!" Man'el laughed triumphantly, taking her hands in his and swinging them back and forth.

Angel could not sleep that night. She lay wide-eyed awake and sometimes shivering in her bed under the windy shingles, wondering at the strange new face of the world. Her grandmother did not even go to bed, but sat in the kitchen, rocking very slowly back and forth, peering into the coals and sucking her gums. A little before dawn she killed and dressed a pair of pullets and carried them away with her down the lane, wrapped in an old shawl. She was back before Angel was up.

"Look 't this bottle, Pretty," she said. "I got it to the drug-store, an' folks says it 'll make y'r hair yellah. See. Avo got it for Pretty."

Sitting bolt up in bed, Angel stared at the bottle for a long time after the Avo had hobbled down-stairs again.

"Oh yes. I remember now."

Her anger with the Avo grew beyond bounds. She ran around the room in her bare feet, hunting for a place to break the bottle. In the end she let it drop down between the floor and the eaves, and then sat on the edge of the bed, staring at nothing.

Even the oldest crones in the neighborhood could see the difference in Angel after that, and wagged their heads and pursed their lips, for, though their eyes were dim, their wits were sharp for a thing of this kind.

What they saw in Angel was something hard, glittering, something purposeful. For a year she

had been putting away nickels and pennies against the St. Michels' excursion to New Bedford in the spring, and now everybody knew, from Evelina Silva, who worked in Matheson's store, how she had spent it all in one morning for a piece of yellow silk and a pair of patent-leather pumps with French heels. She brushed her teeth, too, and the grocer-boy who caught her in the kitchen one morning rubbing her cheeks hard with a rough towel did not fail to tell of it.

She couldn't fool the old women. Perhaps they were a little disappointed when she did not try. Any one with eyes was free to see her, when Peter Um Perna came up the lane, standing slim and brazen in the doorway, "showing off" the waist she had made from the yellow silk, and those patent-leather pumps with the French heels. A spot of color like a rose-petal burned in either cheek, and the lights in the hair framing the lovely oval of her face were like blue sabers in a mist. She stared at Peter as he passed, looked him over with the bland incuriosity of a stranger till her eyes came to that brass-shod peg, when she smiled a little to herself. One could see the cords in Peter's cheeks tighten and stand out, that was all. He went on fingering his mustache and toying with the watch-chain as if he did not know she was there. How they hated each other, Angel Avellar and Peter Um Perna!

Man'el Costa wanted to laugh. He was delighted with Angel, and more and more with

every passing week he wondered that he could have looked at any other girl. And yet, from time to time, a ripple of uneasiness passed across his simple soul. He spoke of it one evening in the Avo's front room, where he came to see Angel quite often now and sit on the sofa with his arm around her, oblivious to the old woman's vindictive screechings from the kitchen.

"You—you're sure y' like me, Angel? Y' ain't beginnin' t'—to—"

There was no need to finish the question; the answer was in the dark, reproachful eyes which seemed to be looking through him and beyond. She spoke after a moment in a musing tone.

"He told me I was ugly. Did I ask him? Did I ask him? Say!" She jumped up to straighten a corner of the carpet with a toe. "I tell you," she cried, wheeling on Man'el. "You want t' know what I wisht? I wisht that—that *thing* there—would come crawlin' on *his* knees—to *me*—*me*, Man'el. Just *once*, Man'el!"

Man'el stared at his finger-nails and laughed uncertainly. "I'd like t' see you *then*, Angel, old girl."

The Avo, hobbling in, held up her two shaking hands. "*Look* at 'em," she quavered. "All et up with the wash. An' who did I wash f'r—t' keep her soul 'n' body togither? Eh? What does *she* care? Eeee! Eeee! She'd be glad if I was dead 'n' gone! Wisht I was! I wisht I was."

Angel was not the only one changed by that early winter. People said that Peter Um Perna was going crazy with his money. " 'S if he didn't have enough a'ready," they said. "Don' use his head no more at all, at all."

It was quite true, he didn't use his head. For after the weathers came on and other skippers hauled up or lay snug in their houses on the watch for fine days, Peter went out in everything. An abiding anger dwelt in him. Driving his dories overboard in a northeaster, he lost all his gear; and his crew, coming home empty-handed for their pains, refused to go again, even when he came stamping through the lanes calling them out, but had their women-folks pull down the front shades and sat in their kitchens, grinning and ill at ease. On his way home that day Man'el Costa had stopped in at the Avo's back shed with his bunk-tick over his shoulder.

"Ugh-ugh," he sniggered. "Home 'n' mother's good enough f'r me."

He had not counted on Angel, who met his announcement with blazing eyes.

"You'd let him scare y' out, would you? You would, would you?"

Peter Um Perna grinned in an odd way when Man'el came after that to say he would go. They went out the day before Christmas with four Lisbon "ginnies" harried out of a back-street boarding-house, not in the big schooner, of course, but in Peter's second craft, the *Mena*, which his uncle

went dragging in through the summer. Angel went down to watch them go off from the beach in their dory. They looked tiny and shaky against the sky and water, both of a pitiless gray.

It began to snow about midnight—a soft, windless downfall, blinding at a dozen yards. The telephone-girl at the drug-store had the news before nine in the morning—the *Mena* on the bar at Plymouth, and breaking up fast with the flood tide. Yes, they had gotten the men ashore.

Word of shipwreck had run white-lipped through Old Harbor times out of mind in the past. But this Christmas day there were no white lips or eyes aching for tears, unless they were up there at the top of Nickerson's Lane, where sister Philomena stood behind the long windows and watched the people clear away their snow, limping grotesquely, putting fingers to noses and hallooing down the dazzling passage. Philomena knew what it meant. Fate could not fool Philomena. Had she not been waiting for this? Had she not been fondling the darling fear of this disaster in the bottom of her heart? The golden spell was beginning to fade.

Angel Avellar sat in the front room at her house, chin in hand, brooding over the unseasonable flowers in the carpet.

"I'm glad," she repeated over and over. "Glad! Glad! *Glad!*"

That night the festival of *Menin' Jesus*

brightened all the windows along the lane, making a joyful, steep corridor, walled in, for once, from the hungry ocean and the ruthless sky. There was music, too, of mandolins and island lutes, and men chanting the "*Parcido im Belam!*"

Avo Avellar had been hard at her housework all day, dusting and scrubbing, making her tiny altar of boards, getting out the new wheat carefully sprouted in saucers, and the candles, the bizarre little Virgin and Child, saints and cows and asses, brought with her from the islands. The wine also, in the huge black bottle, was island wine.

Not many came to the Avo's—a few old gossips to mumble over the cake and wine, and three or four young fellows, shy of Angel at first till they found how the wind of her humor blew, when they all made fun of the One-leg louder and louder as the candle-fires danced in the girl's eyes, strummed their mandolins, and drank of the old woman's wine.

They fell silent of a sudden and wished they were somewhere else when Peter Um Perna stood in the doorway.

"*Bóm noite!*" he said to the company.

Convoyed by the ecstatic Avo, he entered and took a chair before the altar. He remained as the life-crew had taken him from his doomed vessel, one sleeve split, his collar gone, and his shirt laid open at the throat. They were astounded to see him so mild, as though his losing

battle with the sea had somehow rested him. For a long time he sat staring into the candle-ranks. Once he murmured, "Good cake, Avo," and again, "Good wine, old woman!" He drank the wine eagerly, but seemed to forget the cake. Once he started and looked about. "Where all the folks went to?" he wondered, vaguely.

The Avo got rid of the question with a wave of her skinny hands, and filled his glass again. One could not help wondering at the frail old woman all through that night. Now she was at Peter Um Perna's elbow, a pervading minister; now she was in the kitchen, where the company had crowded to wait and watch and whisper, crossing her lips with a savage finger, grinning and chuckling through her gums, or shaking her fists at Angel, who remained in the front room, sitting in an angle between the altar and one of the front windows.

There was something luxurious about Angel's attitude, leaning back at her ease, and something at the same time triumphant. One could think of her as having saved up precious moments against this night, moments of deep scorn or anger, and moments of especial beauty. Now and then her lips curled slightly with her contempt, but beyond this her face remained perfectly impassive, even when Peter Um Perna looked up at her once and down again quickly with a curious flush on his cheeks.

By and by, lulled by the wine and the candle-

light, he seemed to forget where he was. His face grew oddly boyish, soft, and untired—he was remembering the red tiles and the rank, sweet gardens of Fayal.

Avo crooned a strange pæan over the kitchen fire! "Drunk in my house! Drunk in my house!" Some of the old women dozed; she hustled them awake. Others wanted to go home, it was so unearthly an hour, but she held them with incredible stratagems, even standing with her feeble back against the door. The cup was not to be snatched from her lips now.

Peter was looking at Angel as though he had never seen her before. "You're pretty," he mused. "My, my, but you're pretty."

She started ever so little in her chair, then lay back and covered a yawn. "Think so?" she murmured, gazing at the ceiling.

His face twitched and colored, as if for an instant he tried to pull himself together. He let himself go on again with a waving hand.

"I wished you liked me a—a little bit. If you—if you—"

"Who, *me?* Liked *you?*" The candle-light showed Angel's smooth, round neck trembling with pent laughter. It seemed incredible that this was the Angel Avellar of half a year ago. "Me like *you—you?*"

"Yeah-yeah!" He strained toward her. "God, if you c'd on'y like me enough t' get married with me! Couldn't you now—couldn't you?"

"Why don't y' get down onto your knees, then?"

"Yeah-yeah—wait a secon'. Yeah-yeah!"

He had forgotten that wooden peg of his; it caught between the chair-rungs and flung him down on one shoulder at Angel's feet.

The devils were loose in Angel Avellar. Leaning over the prostrate man, she seemed to drink of the gray, twitching horror on his face.

"What 'd I say?" he whispered, not yet moving.

"You crawled on your knees for me t' marry you, Peter Um Perna!"

She gazed into his eyes with a smile of sweet poison. But it was not enough; she was still thirsty. She had meant to spurn him now with a laugh, but the cornered look in his eyes gave her a far finer thrust. "And I *will* marry you, Peter One-leg. You hear? I *will!* I *will!*"

He scrambled up with his back to the wall. He seemed dazed to find curious, exultant faces packing the kitchen door, the Avo's witnesses.

"I never!" he mumbled his denial. "I never, either!"

Angel turned and blew out the candles on the altar, showing the room cold with dawn. She shivered a little with her triumph. "Oh, well!" She shrugged her shoulders. "If you don't—" She was making sport of him, Peter, before these people. *Him! Peter Duarte!* Devils were loose somewhere else now.

"All right!" he bawled. "Come on t' the priest, damn you, *right now!*"

They studied each other's eyes. The girl's lips scarcely moved.

"You—you think I wouldn't?"

"You think *I* wouldn't?" Peter whispered, too. Then they both repeated it, wondering, almost appealing.

"You—think—I—*wouldn't?*"

"You—think—*I*—wouldn't?"

Old Harbor will forget many things before it forgets that morning of passion. Angela Avellar and Peter Um Perna were married in the yellow chapel up-street as soon as things could be gotten ready, still scarcely knowing that they did, driven helpless on an obscure tempest, becoming one flesh in hate. When they walked home to the Nickerson house it was between two lines of people who shouted, "Kill the cripple, old boy!" at sight of Man'el Costa, sleep and rage in his eyes, barring their path half-way up the hill. When he could not stand up before those two intolerable masks, the crowd jeered and hooted to see him ducking away from the Avo's triumphant stick.

It was after this that Man'el began to drift aimlessly from house to house, lowering and rumbling, stopping wherever they would give him the lees of last night's wine and listen to his threats.

"Like t' see 'im go fishin' t'-day. Ain't so anxious t' go t'-day, is he?"

They spurred him on; he grew wilder as the wine moved him more and more. "Go fishin'! *I'd* go with the bastard. Tell 'im Man'el Costa 'll go. Take the little *Sea Bird* now—jest the two of us—man an' man. Go fishin', eh? *I'd* go! Tell 'im Man'el Costa 'd go."

A blind man would not have known there were people in the Nickerson living-room that morning even though he had sat there an hour. Sister Philomena huddled down in a far corner, clutching an ancient shawl about her frame with both hands, as if to say, "They can't take this away from me—*leastways* not *this!*"

Avo Avellar sat between the "children" with her chin propped on her stick. She was as motionless as the dead, except for her eyes, which went unceasingly from one to the other. She had spent herself in her one wild night, and now she was bankrupt, and content.

And all the while, for an hour, perhaps two hours, Peter and Angel stared at the same flower in the middle of the carpet.

Peter was the first to move. He got up to wander about the room at his halting gait, putting a hand on the wall here and there, standing for a long time in front of that dim Virgin between the windows.

"Make y'rself to home," he said, suddenly, with his hand on the door-latch. Angel met his eyes with a regard as colorless as his own.

"I will," she said.

Philomena's fire had gone out and the room grew very cold. The Avo roused herself, mumbling, "Avo go git some o' y' things, Pretty," and hobbled out by the back way. Presently Philomena vanished, too, noiseless as a scared mouse, leaving Angel alone with the flower in the carpet.

She was not to continue so for long. The door swung open violently, discovering Philomena's face chalkier than ever and her hands clawing appeal.

"Don' let 'im go!" she screamed. "Aw, don' let 'im go. Please, girl—good, pretty girl—don' let 'im go in this! God sake!"

Angel found herself at a window with a giddy sense of having been wafted there by some mysterious violence.

"Wha-what you wa-wa-want?" she stammered.

"Don' let 'im go! Don'—" The woman's passionate drone filled her ears. She wondered with an odd detachment why the folks in the pallid sunshine outside were shrugging and grinning at the house.

"Don't keep saying that!" she cried. "Now what's the— O-oh!"

The world was leprous. Here and there on its gray skin a spot of pallor glowed and dimmed as the sun fought to keep it. A spot ran down to the Avo's palings, and another far out there at the Point lent to the Light and its outbuildings a momentary and unnatural radiance. Still

farther beyond, the mainsail of a sloop slanted across the fugitive glory and passed out, as if a gray hand had reached to take it.

"Him? Mena—is that *him?*"

So this was why the people grinned. As though her ears could hear through walls and spaces, Angel caught up the words from their lips: "Left 'er on his weddin'-day! Well, well, well, well, I never!" A spot of fire showed on her cheek, regular and clear-cut, like the mark of a slap.

For a time now she made no effort to control herself. Months of hate and wounds and bitterness had their hour of bloom. Once, in the half-gloom of the upper hall, she wheeled on Philomena, who followed her everywhere like a frightened dog. "Don't let 'im go, you say? Ha-ha-ha! You make me laugh. Don't let 'im come *back*—that's what I pray on my knees to the sweet Virgin of Pity."

Her sick fury drove her from room to room. She stood at an upper window and saw the storm getting itself together out of that vast gray yeast of the world. She saw the chimney-smudges topple for a moment and then lie down flat and thin, and she heard the first impact of the wind against the shingles overhead. And there came Avo Avellar, fighting with the wind for the bundle on her head, pathetic bits of finery done up in a pillow-case, Angel's trousseau. For the first time, seemingly, she realized that the thing

was done, completed; that she could not somehow wake up and find it a nightmare.

The house became quite dark. She wanted to lie down somewhere and cover her head with blankets to keep out the sound of the wind. In a bedroom where she came a photograph of Peter stood on the bureau. She took it in her hands, tore it once across, and sinking down in a rocker by the window, remained there for a long time, holding the pieces in her hands. Her sense of helplessness deepened when she glanced down by and by and discovered the futility of her anger; the face in the picture was not touched.

It had been taken, evidently, before Peter was hurt. It carried her back to the front room at the Avo's, and the altar and the candles and this face here in her hand dreaming into the light. For here was the same look of the boy in the man, the same air of an artless and delightful indecision, of expectancy, of human accessibility.

Angel lay down on the bed and began to cry. She was so utterly worn out that she wanted to die, or to sleep, but the wind would not let her die and it would not let her sleep. The house shivered with it; the bed shivered with it. She pulled a comfort over her head, but the wind came through that feeble barrier, carrying its voices, the singing sleet, the thunder of ocean flinging on its beaches; and other voices—voices insistent, remote, and ghostly. One crept into

the room with her, wailing, "He's dead 'n' gone—dead 'n' gone—dead 'n' gone—"

It was so real that she flung off the comfort and stared about wildly. Philomena crouched in a corner, invisible save for the gray patch of her face. The burden of her wailing changed. "What 'd you make 'im go f'r? What 'd you make 'im go f'r?"

Angel lifted on her arms. "No, no, Mena! I never made him go. I never! Could *I* help it if he couldn't stand the sight o' me? *Could I*, Mena?"

"He went because *you* couldn't stan' the sight o' *him!* An' you know it, you—you terrible, wicked thing, you!"

The tempest seemed to withdraw for a moment and leave the bedroom with its two dim, gray faces hanging in a windless hush. Angel's voice seemed far off, as though there were another person speaking.

"What—you—talkin' about?"

"Dead 'n' gone, dead 'n' gone. Oh, dear, dear!" Philomena rocked from side to side. "You made 'im go in a gale o' wind. You made 'im crazy so long, so long, an' you wouldn't look at 'im because he's a cripple."

"What you talkin' about?"

"What a shame, a shame! If folks on'y knowed how good he was an' how sweet-tempered when he's alone an' nobody watchin' him. I've hear' 'im talk s' sweet it's a'most poetry.

But when folks 's watchin' him, it's same's a crooked devil in Peter, an' he had t' make fun of 'em first before they made fun o' him. An' now he's dead 'n' gone, dead 'n' gone!"

Angel slid from the bed and shook the woman's arm, as she might have aroused a sleeper. "But what about *me?*" she demanded.

"About you?" Philomena's voice lifted wild and sore above the gale, like a prayer for vengeance. "Why 'd you stan' in your yard f'r two long year, then? Two year ago he come home one night an' set in front o' the fire, sayin' to himself, 'That little girl!' over 'n' over till you'd want t' laugh. You wouldn' think t' see a growed-up man cry, would you? I've see my brother cry time a-plenty, behind his four walls here. An' other times he wouldn' cry, but say: 'Na-na. She likes this here Costa boy, an' what is it t' me? F'rgit it, Peter!' An' then he'd set f'rgittin' it. What 'd you do it f'r, girl?"

"Answer *me* a question. Why'd he call me ugly that night then?"

"Answer *me* a question. Why wouldn' he eat no supper that night? An' why'd he act the way he done after you d went, carryin' on same's a drunk man, spittin' onto his peg-leg, an' tryin' t' bust it off in the door, an cursin' God that 'd struck 'im a cripple for pretty Angel t' make sport of? Answer me *that* question, then!"

Angel cried for pity. "Mena, you're lyin' to me!"

"Ya-ya, an' mebby it's a lie he's went out in a forty-foot sloop-boat an' got drownded!" The finality of things seemed a tonic to the woman; disaster purged her of the old fear of disaster and gave her a shrewish malignance. "All right," she screeched. "All right! He ain't the on'y one, though. There's two went if there's one, an' now where's that pretty brown-face Man'el o' yourn? Ha-ha-ha! Ow-w! Don't do that!"

"Did Man'el go with him? Say! Quick!"

"He did. Ya-ya-ya! He did!"

Angel's face grew grayer still with a horrible misgiving. "But why? What's the reason he went?"

"Ya-ya, you can holler plenty now. There's two of us now. Hark! What's that—downstairs, poundin' on the door?" she whispered.

Angel whispered, too. "The door's locked." They had an absurd sense of being conspirators.

"It—it can't be—"

"Oh, Mena, M-e-e-na, it c-c-couldn't be—"

They clung to each other, forgetting the past.

"Why don't you go, Angel?"

"*You* go, Mena!"

"Na-na, please *you* go!"

Angel crept down the stairs and, while the summons still continued on the door-panels, brought the lamp out from the front room, set it on the marble-top table. Being distracted, she gave an illusion of almost grotesque self-control. She spoke to the door as if the boards had ears.

"Wait! Wait! I hear you! Can't you wait a second?"

She had trouble with the bolt, and even when it was undone she seemed not to know enough to pull the door, but stood in the middle of the hallway with her hands pressed against her cheeks. A hungry color swept her face when Man'el Costa came in. He laughed to see it.

"Waitin', eh?" He took off his oilskin hat and shook it, spattering on the floor. "Scared I wouldn't come back, eh, Angel, honey?"

"But—but where—is—he, Man'el?"

"Oh, that's all right. Needn't be a-scared o' that now, Angel, old girl." He ripped his jacket open, blowing and elated. "Needn't be scared the One-leg 'll bother you no more, no more."

"*Man'el!*"

Angel sat down suddenly on the bottom step of the stairs. Man'el confronted her, jubilant.

"Lucky girl—lucky, lucky girl! A swell house an' a pot o' money an' no harm done. Who'd 've believed it, Angel? My, my! An' t' think I was sorer 'n hell this mornin'! But it's all right now, ain't it, old girl?"

"But, Man'el, where—*is*—he?"

"Ain't I told you it's all right? How d' *I* know where he is *now?* Las' I seen of 'im he's ridin' to an anchor between the Peaked Hill bars with the anchor draggin' all the time an' the inner bar dead astern. I come in on a freighter. They got a boat 'longside of us an' took me off. God!

how it was breezin'! Seas comin' clean acrost us! No time to do no argyin' with *him*—no time f'r beggin' a man, I tell you *that!*"

"Argyin'? *Beggin'?*" Angel's hand groped and found a spindle of the banister, whitening with the grip. "Man'el, but I don't understand. Why didn't he come in with you?'

"Why? Why? How 'd I know—'less it's the reason he's went off his head—crazy 's a bedbug. Settin' there into the fo'c's'le with his head in his hands, bawlin' like a baby.... Oh, that—that you, Mena?" A decent solemnity changed his voice at sight of Philomena's face hanging in the opening above, gray, quiet, and stricken. "It's too bad, Mena, but, Mena—I—I'm a-scared your brother—" His floundering made him nervous. "Angel," he protested, "you tell 'er!"

But Angel was gone.

From Si Nickerson's Lane it is three miles across the cape to the Peaked Hill life-saving station.

They could hardly believe their eyes in the station-house—Angel seemed more a wind-driven ghost than any human wanderer, with her white lips and her vague, pleading eyes and her back against the booming panels of the door by which she had entered. For the third time now she repeated her words, very slowly and distinctly, and with a kind of desperate patience and a child-like faith that if she could just make these stub-

born men understand what she wanted it would be all right.

"You see—we got to hurry—quick. Because the reason my husband's on the bar out there. All alone in a sloop-boat, my husband is, and his anchor's draggin'. Don't you understand?"

The station captain, Ed Cook, banged his fists in growing exasperation. "You said that twict a'ready. I hear you. And I tell you your husband's all safe 'n' sound at home by this time. I tell you we got a telephone from a freighter, and he took 'im off a sloop-boat out here. Can't you hear? You deef? Took 'im off—brought 'im in—safe 'n' sound to home, now. Hear? Git me?"

"But you don't understand," she commenced all over again. "It's the *other* man's my husband. He's all alone in a sloop-boat—"

"God sake, be sensible. You don't think they'd go t' work and take one man off a boat and leave the other!"

No. 2 man, beyond the table, lowered an eyelid and put his knuckles on his forehead. The captain, nodding understanding, got up from his chair by the stove and laid a hand on Angel's arm. An odd, new kindness was in his voice.

"It's all right, girl. We'll go out in just a few minutes, but first you got to dry your clo'es and get rested up. Better lay down a spell, hadn't you?"

"I can go along, too, though, can't I?"

"Sure thing—surest thing you know! Only first, now—"

It was curious to see the rough, literal fellows grow artful in double-dealing. They got her into the captain's office, and when she would not lie down on the sofa, but sat clinging to a seaward window-sill, they took turns sitting with her, coming out of the darkened room now and then like men relieved from a heavy wheel-watch to rub their hands over the stove and whisper about it.

"God alive!" muttered No. 5 once, "the way she talks in there you'd almost think 'twas so."

"But it ain't!" No. 3 shook the other fiercely by the wrist. "Good God! it ain't, you know."

It began to do queer things to them as the night wore on; that ceaseless, boring reiteration in the darkened room. The watches changed, the beach patrols came in blowing and flapping their "oilers," heard the tale, and stared curiously at the tellers. The reliefs went out, north and south, and still the clock ticked the night away, and the yeast of a strange unrest worked on in them. It was Captain Cook himself, coming out of the office with sweat standing on his forehead, who struck his fist on the table and swore defensively: "Hell!—we couldn't la'nch the boat in this—anyhow!"

He had failed to latch the door and it swung open behind him, giving up a voice, husky, quivering with an eagerness that would not

dim: "Please—I'm dry now, ain't I? I'm rested up! Can't we go now? Because the reason we got to hurry—hurry! He'll be onto the bar in—in half an hour, I think. Oh, please—"

"For God's sake, shut that door!" The captain combed his beard violently. Somewhere in the back of the room one of the men hazarded:

"It's moderatin' a trifle, by the sound, ain't it?"

The captain bawled at him, "Moderatin' *hell!*" He was gone next minute, climbing the stairs to the lookout's cupola. "Hey, Tom!" he shouted up the dark ascent, "what d' y' make?"

The steady tramping overhead ceased and a voice came down very thin against the background of the gale. "She's haulin' a bit now. Moderatin' a bit, cap'n. She'll come clear with the sun, I wouldn't wonder."

"Yeh, but that there craft offshore? Make 'er out any, Tom?"

"Mast's away. Don't make no life aboard. They took that fellow off, y' know. She'll hit the inner bar 'n half an hour, I should—"

"Half-hour! What makes you say a half-nour?" The captain's feet were dancing on the stair. "Gull-damn it! You heard her."

They got out of the house on tiptoe, like a band of conspirators. They had to fight the surf-boat down the bluff against a wall of wind and spray, gray-pink with the coming dawn. They caught their breath, waiting for the break of the wave,

yelled all together, ran the boat out through the white smother, up to their shoulders, scrambled aboard, hauling at one another, tugging—and one that they tugged at was Angel Avellar.

"I'm rested now," she cried.

They thrust her down between two thwarts, bawling: "Shut up! Shut up!" and, catching half the crest of the coming wave, slid strongly into the trough.

When they came up with the *Sea Bird*, beyond the lather of the inner bar, they found a dead thing, ready for her grave—a log, lifting and subsiding sluggishly with the swells, her decks swept clean of gear, her mast lying over the port board with the rigging swathed about it like a hank of seaweed. They rested on their oars a couple of fathoms from her side, just keeping their heads up to the sea, and set up a desultory hailing. They began to feel more than ever idiotic; the inevitable revulsion set in. One shouted, "Hell's fire! le's get out o' this!" and others, "That's right! Damn fools, the lot of us!" The captain feathered the stern-sweep, waiting for the break to swing the boat inshore. He tried to avoid Angel's eyes, two thwarts away, and when he failed he scowled glumly at her, grumbling:

"Look what y' done!"

It made no impression on her. She turned her eyes across the little strip of water and back to him, smiling, half wistful, half joyous. "He's waitin' for us."

Swinging the boat's head in with an angry jerk, he cried: "God's sake! climb aboard then, an' get it off your mind and over with. Heave 'er aboard there, boys! God's sake! the bother of 'er!"

Very cautiously she disappeared within the companionway of the tiny forecastle. They waited, holding on and fending off with their boat-hooks, afraid to meet one another's eyes, grumbling, " 'S too bad—too damn bad."

The wrack over the water grew lighter and changed imperceptibly from pink to a pale lemon, and still they waited, not knowing what to do, till Ed Cook protested, "By Heaven! that's about enough o' *this*," and got himself over the sloop's taffrail. He teetered forward and bent down to peer into the black hole, and then, turning half around, he sat down in a heap on the house and took off his hat. "And jus' to *think!*" he wondered, "jus' to *think!*"

Angel's voice came out to him, insistent and faintly querulous, as though she tried to wake a sleeper. "Peter, Peter—look at me, Peter! Didn't you know I liked you always—ever since —ever since— Oh, Peter, Peter!—not to know *that!* Peter, look at me!"

Another voice was shallow and bewildered, like the sleeper awakened.

"Wh'—why—Angel! That little girl!" He must have been touching her with his incredulous hands, down there in the gloomy place, for the

next words were: "Why, you—you're *really!* But—but what you doin' down here, An-angel?"

"Can't you see, Peter? Can't you see?" There was an inexpressible triumph in the cry. "I'm down on my knees, Peter!"

The dawn came with a rush now, striking through the mists with its keen, level blades, cutting them away in vast, high-curling slices, letting in the blue sky.

THE KILLER'S SON

I AM, as you know, a practising physician. My home is in Endicott, Vermont. My library, which serves also as my office, faces the old Wait house, where Anthony Brown and his mother came to live (out of nowhere) and where they spent their thirteen years of silence and isolation. You have expressed an interest in the story of Anthony Brown. I set it down as truly and consecutively as I am able. Part of the events chronicled here I saw with my own eyes, part I had from the little man with the crooked head, and part from Anthony Brown—for it is by that name I shall always remember him. You will understand that I am the "Mr. Doctor" of the narrative.

Here are some of the things Anthony Brown knew at the time of my first acquaintance with him. He was then about four years old.

He knew, first of all, that he did not possess such a thing as a father. He knew that he had come with his mother to this dark, ancient house from another place, far off, where the houses all

stood shoulder to shoulder, and where a man brought the milk in a yellow cart, like a little cabin set on wheels. He remembered that they had come away from that place in a tremendous hurry, but when he tried to discuss this with his mother the "look" always appeared on her face.

Then, too, his mother had been something different in that place of the shouldering houses—not "Mrs. Brown." Somehow he could not seem to catch the right set of words for her, though sometimes when he was alone he would shout out "*Mrs.*—er—" very suddenly, in order to trick that elusive other word into the light. It was the same way with that word which had meant his brother—oh, yes, there had been a brother, even though his mother said there had not. It was probably some game his mother was playing—an inscrutable game, because one must not laugh or appear to be enjoying it. He had laughed once, and then there was the "look" which always frightened him. But he could remember the fact of a brother clearly, even if he were a little misty as to how he had looked and quite blank about the word which had meant him. Why, even he himself had been called another word. It was not "Anthony." It was something very like it. He could get the taste of it in his mouth when he jumped out at it—but never quite *it*.

His mother played the same game even with the Congregational minister and Mrs. J. D.

Ellory of Elloryhurst, the first callers—and the last. Anthony could not understand this episode in the least, and so it had to take its place with the other "naturally" things, along with that abrupt departure from the region of the yellow milk-cart. The callers came quite kindly in the Elloryhurst surrey, and they smiled at Anthony when they were seated in the parlor. He was amazed to hear them asking if his father had been long dead—as though they did not know there was no such thing as a father—and where his mother had come from. He could have told them about the yellow milk-cart himself—it was his mother who had forgotten now. At least she was shaking her head, and Anthony could see the "look" coming. But at that juncture he was shut out of the room and could follow the affair no further, save that there came a muffled outcry of indignation from Mrs. Ellory of Elloryhurst followed by the banging of the front door. Nor did he see his mother again that day or night, a crack of light under her door being the only token of her existence when he went up to bed, hungry and frightened.

Of course there was fruit from this seed. Anthony did not understand at all what it meant when the boys with whom he was trying to play "ships" in the brook behind his house called him names. It is quite probable they did not understand either—something heard at home, more than likely.

He wondered if the reason the other boys would not play with him was because his ship was so much more splendid than theirs. He had made it out of a sharpened board and it had sails of envelopes which Mr. Doctor across the street had given him. It was something of a trick to keep the cargo on, but once tied down with string it journeyed to the second stump on his own side of the brook with quite creditable security.

It was impossible to conceive why his mother should come out of "behind" so suddenly and jerk him away from the bank and then set to work with a fearful, ice-cold deliberation to break that ship of his into all the splinters it could be, using two flat rocks for the destruction. It must have been another of those "naturally" things. But Anthony had never seen the "look" so horrible and hard and crazy on her face as when she led him away then to lock him, like a criminal, in the woodhouse.

That was the night the wind blew. Anthony could hear it rising from the first, tentative friskings about the shingles of the woodhouse to the full majesty of its flight. There were a million trillion great devils back there in the hills trying to catch it—that was why it ran so fast and screeched so loudly. It rocked the floor under his feet, and once there was a fearful crashing in the yard, which was a bough tearing away from one of the maples. He did not know his mother had come till he heard the soft scraping of the

latch outside, and even then he did not see her, as she ran off silently as she had come.

It was very hard to have to go up-stairs all alone in the dark when the wind was blowing. He knew what happened when the wind blew. He had been through it before. It was always the same. A crack of light under his mother's door, bright and dim, bright and dim, like a Jack-o'-lantern when the candle is going out. That was because she had all the windows open and the lamp smoked. "Naturally" she had the windows open when the wind blew. He would have been amazed to learn that all grown-ups did not open their windows wide to the gale, and writhe and groan and become quite different from what they were in quiet weather.

This was the most incredibly fearful night. For the crack of light became intensely brilliant just as his boot-soles were passing it, then it went out altogether and his mother screamed—inside the door there. That was why he ran down-stairs and out into the yard behind the lilac-bush, where Mr. Doctor found him in the great wind and had the true state of affairs out of him directly.

It was a long wait, there in the front hall, wrapped in his mother's cape, until Mr. Doctor came down the stairs again, with his candle making the shadows clamber up and sit on top of the high, dark furniture. And then the questions Mr. Doctor asked—so many million of them—for a sleepy boy to answer.

"And what do you say to this, sir?" Mr. Doctor asked abruptly, putting a piece of cardboard beneath the boy's nose. "Ever seen this before?"

The boy had never seen it or anything like it. There were nine people pictured there (if one counted the bundle in the woman's lap). A man sat there and his six sons stood about him. The largest of them might have been eighteen, the smallest (not counting the bundle) six. The man's skin was smooth and dark, like the Wait furniture in the hall; his hair, parted over the left temple, was black; a black mustache shot across his lip and turned at either tip straight up to the high cheek-bones. And though he was dressed in unmistakable "Sunday clothes," he carried them with a certain debonair tilt of the shoulders—not sheepishly, as our Endicott farmers do. A full-belted, lusty man, whom one could imagine going a long way to carry a romantic point.

The woman, sitting in the center with the bundle, was very beautiful: her eyes were calm, and her hair had not then turned streaked as it had since. But how queer of her to be there! She was no more like the man, or those six replicas of him standing at his shoulders, than she was like the seventh replica, come out of the bundle now and sitting, shivering and wide-eyed, on the old Wait hall-chest.

Mr. Doctor looked at the picture a long time and then at the boy, as though comparing them.

He said, slowly: "And yet they call you a—er—We won't say. . . . What's that?"

"*Raphul!*" the boy had cried out, with a sudden explosive triumph. Mr. Doctor saw his finger, still grubby with front-yard mold, hovering over the boy of six who leaned on the pictured woman's shoulder. "Raphul—I just remembered." He had caught that word which meant his brother without jumping.

"There was another place where I lived," he went on, a frown of concentration between his black eyebrows. "I just remembered. It was before."

Mr. Doctor leaned forward and pinched his knee, as though to help him.

"What was it like?" he said. The boy's eyes wandered here and there in vacancy. The frown deepened as though he sought desperately through the dim rooms of memory.

"I can't—I can't—" The boy was struggling painfully to remember. Mr. Doctor shook his head and muttered:

"Too much—too much." Then he took the picture up-stairs again and put it back under the table where he had found it. He went on tiptoe, so as not to disturb Anthony's mother, who slept because he had given her some medicine.

Thirteen years is a long time to live in one yard, when no one comes into that yard but the postman and the boy from Lucas's store and Mr. Doctor. The postman had been three different

persons and the boy from Lucas's store at least six when Anthony was seventeen.

A life of that sort does things to one—very queer things. For one, the continuous existence in the shadow—of the indoors, of the Wait maples, of one knows not what—makes one pale, even though there be an echo of something darker beneath the pallor. For another, it makes one slight and nervous and inept at handling things, and moody and apt to shout out with an abrupt bitterness at Mr. Doctor: "If she'd only tell me *what it was* he did, why, it wouldn't be such a blind sort of hell."

"Steady, boy. Now what's wrong with your 'innards'? Tell the doctor."

"That's it—*that's it.* What *is* the matter with my 'innards'? What's in my blood that one can't speak of it? What in the name of the devil was this inconceivable crime of my father's? What am I tainted with, that she would rather have people avoid and scorn me than *that?*"

Then the inevitable lapse into inertia and gloom, and after that the unwholesome fever mounting again—

"I'm no good—I know I'm no good. I'm hollow. I can feel it. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to run away from this place—I don't care—I don't care—"

"Hush, boy; here's your mother."

It was on the day this talk was talked that the

man came down Methodist Hill. One could see him far off, crawling like a little fly down the road. It was very dry and a tiny umbrella of dust followed above him.

He came down and dipped out of view behind the fence, still far off, came on and on under his umbrella of dust and had passed as far as Anthony's lilac when he happened to look over his shoulder at the doorway. Anthony's mother, coming out of the door just then, put out her two hands suddenly to clasp the door-frames, as if for support. The man appeared to hesitate and marvel, shuffled his feet in the dust; then he mopped his brow and went on, shaking his head.

Anthony's mother watched him, without moving her head. He went perhaps a dozen rods along the street and stopped again. Then he came plodding back and stood in the gateway, his hat in his hand. His head, now that it was uncovered, appeared quite crooked, as though it had been twisted with an enormous pair of tweezers. He was tanned to a rich brown, and dusty.

"Is that you?" he said, addressing Anthony's mother. "We all been lookin' for you."

"Yes," she said, as though that single syllable had torn its way through flesh.

The man put his bundle down by the gate and came in. The two in the garden beside the house could hear a scraping of chairs from an unseen corner of the porch.

Anthony had been watching all this with his eyes wide and his lips open a little, like his mother's. When he spoke, it was as always with a sudden, passing fire.

"Say—say—that's too much. A bum—and she knew him."

Still with the glow of that short fire he jumped from the bench and started toward the front of the house, but Mr. Doctor was in front, waving him back.

"I have a right," Anthony cried. "I have a right to hear. Say—haven't I?"

"If she calls you, yes."

But the boy was not to be put off with that. Thirteen years is too long a time to look inward and see nothing. The doctor gave ground slowly before his passion. They could hear the man's voice from the porch now, raised in what might have been supplication or a sort of defiance or a threat. It was a threat. The words came plainly.

"All righ'—all righ'. Go your own way, an' I weel go mine. But w'en I go mine I weel tell w'ere they can fin' heem—the killer's *son*. *So*."

There was no trouble for Mr. Doctor now keeping Anthony in the garden. No. Anthony walked back to the bench and sat down and ran his thin hand over his damp forehead. He did not speak for a long time. By and by he said:

"Well, at least I can see something—now."

There was a sound of feet scraping on the

front steps and then the man with the crooked head came quickly around the corner of the porch as though to run back into the garden where Anthony sat staring at nothing. But Anthony's mother was too quick at the side steps. There she stood, facing the intruder, her arms flung out to bar his path. There was something unutterably craven about that gesture, not credible in this tragic woman with her streaked hair flying. At the same time there was something indomitable about her cringing, like a rat in a corner.

"No, no, no, no!" was all she cried, and her voice sounded oddly girlish. It was as though she had treasured that instant of flaming energy from her childhood, to realize it now.

The man peered across her shoulders for a moment at the boy. Then he drew back, threw out his hands in signal of defeat, laughed, and went away, raising his umbrella of dust to follow him down the street.

That night the wind blew, and Anthony's mother died. She must have been packing half the night, for when they found her in the morning her room was in a litter and two trunks almost full of things. She had had time, at least, to scrawl a note, after she knew she was to die. Anthony showed it to the doctor.

Go to my father's, Robt. Glazier, Elmira, N. Y., sure not to

There the corner was torn off raggedly. They hunted through the room for the missing fragment, but found nothing to fit it.

There were bank-notes on the table—sixty-odd dollars—together with a registered envelope, such as had come every month they had lived in Endicott. It was registered from Elmira.

She was buried two days later in the lot she had bought. That evening the doctor walked across the street to talk with Anthony Brown. It was always hard to find Anthony, especially in the dusk, for Anthony had lived with the shadows so long he had absorbed something of their quality. The doctor searched the garden and all through the house, even to the garret and the woodhouse. At length he had to give it up. Anthony was gone.

I think I can picture the boy sitting in the Boston train, his queer, pale, dark face lowering and defiant in the sickly flare of the smoking-car lamp. On the ragged, three-cornered bit of paper in his hand were the words: "Boston—sure not to Boston." It will be remembered that the paper which Anthony had shown to Mr. Doctor was torn raggedly at the lower right-hand corner.

Poor woman, ridden by some horror as yet occult and unfathomable, the room and the ancient Wait furnishings beginning to sweep around and around her in their ultimate, dim

revolutions—to send *that* crying message from the shadows—that message of all the messages in the world! In Heaven's name, did she not know her own son, with the dry wood of thirteen years to blossom for such a spark as that? Not go to Boston? Why, if there were even a hanging at the other end of it, he would go to Boston. What ill in all the category of ills could be darker than the shadow of Wait maples? After all, a predisposition toward waking in the night and listening fearfully to the roar of blood through one's internal passages, a habit of dropping things, a sudden and overwhelming desire to be dead—all this will grace the end of a rope as handsomely as sturdier virtues.

I don't think he ever really understood that his mother was gone, up to that moment when he stood on a corner and stared down the colored reach of Hanover Street, with its teams and trolleys and hawkers and general hurly-burly of things wanting to be sold before closing-time. It was then that he began to be sick in the pit of his stomach on account of all those thousands of people who passed and told him very plainly that the world was empty. And also on account of the air. He could not say what was the matter with the air, except that it made him feel like quite another person. A fat, red drayman passed at that moment high over the crowd. It occurred to Anthony that if he wanted to, he could very well have that red fellow down and maul his face—

that is, had it not been for the sickness in the pit of his stomach. The air had an utterly different smell from maple shadow—a damp, acrid smell.

Anthony began to drift down with the crowds, and the air smelled more and more outlandish at every step. Yes, he was quite another person. It was evident that this other person (who speculated confidently about thrashing draymen) was expecting to see something happen—something spectacular, like fireworks or a runaway. The pit of Anthony's stomach was hollow now, as though he had been a dried bladder, blown up very tight and needing only a sudden thump to make him screech and collapse. He wished very, very much that he were back under the Wait maples and his mother in sight.

He went the length of Hanover Street, and the spectacle failed to appear. He came into Atlantic Avenue and stood beneath the green globe in front of Schlinsky's. It was a queer light—that green light. He could almost screech now. Two whistles blared, one near at hand, the other far away and faint, sounding in the intervals. He turned and stared across the street. A gaunt, high-angled bowsprit crept into view between two buildings and hung there motionless, its under side illuminated by a street lamp. A filmy, wavering line of spume showed on its white paint, cast up there by some long-dead tropical breaker to dust away in the glare of a city lamp.

Anthony Brown gulped very hard and wondered if he were going to die. The door of Schlinsky's behind him opened with a slight crash and four men came out, one of them drunk enough to roll against his fellows now and then. All of them were dark, with dark mustaches. They had on tight, short coats, faded green or brown, and leather sea-boots.

Well, that wasn't much of a spectacle to behold. Anthony was vaguely angry at this other person who had come so breathlessly to gape at four tipsy fellows coming out of a door. All the same, he screeched a little in his cheeks, and collapsed.

"Hey!" he cried.

The last man stopped and squinted curiously at him. Anthony fell in step and walked along. The man grunted a question in an outlandish tongue.

"Uh-huh," said Anthony.

They crossed the street and came to a tall gate of stakes with a smaller gate cut in the right-hand corner. Inside it was still darker, though there were lights, riding high and blinking at slow intervals, as though they hung in the edge of a forest troubled by a ghostly and soundless wind. The footfalls rang hollow. There was water underneath, coming and going, slow pulsations fretting invisible obstructions.

"W'at vessel you?" asked the man at his side, speaking abruptly in uncouth English.

"Huh? No—I don't know." It seemed that Anthony could not say anything in a connected way.

"You go 'way," the man growled at him, turned, reached out into space, caught something that held, and swung off and down. Anthony followed, clawing awkwardly at the wire shrouds which met his groping. He rested there a moment, his cheek bearing on a hempen rung, and observed how the whole world had fallen to swaying and bobbing gently. Then he laughed outright in the dark. Naturally the world would sway so. "Naturally." It was curious how memory searched out that word from the lumber of the past and laid it before him, like an unimpeachable servitor. The air stank in his nostrils with the death of generations of fish and the acrid stench of bilge, stirred on its planking by the wash of craft in the basin. Anthony did not know it then, but the greatest fish-wharf in the Western world hung there level with his dipping shoulder.

He laughed again and clung to the shrouds. A heavy body approached across the deck below.

"*Tu que he que queres?*"

"Huh?"

"You no spik Portugee? Well—w'at you wan'—ey?"

"I don't know—it's funny—I—"

"Git out!" the man bellowed. He rushed the

shrouds, shook them violently, crowded the boy's feet. "Git out—I don' want no drunks aboard 'ere—no more 'n I 'ave got. Beat eet."

Anthony went back along the echoing boards and opened that gate within a gate through which he had come. He was still laughing to himself. The bleating of that enraged and shadowy ship's-master had not reached him at all.

He had opened the gate carelessly, but now, curiously, he could not go out of it. What had he, Anthony Brown, to do with this pile of city cliffs confronting him from the other side of the aperture, staring him down with its myriad unblinking, precisely angled eyes? It terrified him of a sudden, as the face of a stranger peering in a midnight window—a stranger of whom one has a dim and uneasy memory.

Anthony closed the gate and turned back into the familiar dark. It laid its soothing fingers on his temples. It could afford to be tender, this dark, without fear for its precious dignity. It was so tranquil, so self-sustained, so incorruptible, so ancient—this somber water. The boy came back to that swaying ladder from which he had been banished, descended to the deck, and prowled about on tiptoe, like the ghost of one disinherited. He came upon a coil of Manila cable, piled to the level of his waist and sloping smoothly inside like the section of an enormous funnel. He curled himself in the bottom and slept, shielded by the sides.

It was red morning when he woke and stared up through the schooner's taut lines. He was quite blank about things. He wondered why his back ached so, until he discovered that he lay flat upon it in the center of the deck, where he had been thrown violently. A vaguely familiar uproar was in progress near him. He turned his eyes and perceived the roarer—that enraged shadow of the night before—bawling and gesturing across the weather rail. What was it all about? He raised himself painfully and followed the direction of the furious pantomime with his bewildered eyes.

One half of the horizon was clear water, the other half water clogged with islands. Here was a white lighthouse, looking preternaturally clear-cut and thin in the level rays of the sun. Over there were straight lines of green bordered by tiny doll-houses converging up the slope of a hill, with a ruffle of white breakers all around.

Nearer at hand, a towboat sheered off from the schooner. Her master, a fat, dingy man with a small head, sat like an inverted turnip on the taffrail, watching across the water-space the ponderous antics of the schooner captain. He appeared quite phlegmatic and uninterested.

"Don' you *'ear?*" the man bellowed. "We got bum—stow'way. Come tek 'eem back."

The towboat man opened his mouth without disturbing his other facial muscles.

"Go t' hell! Gi' me my hunderd 'n' thirty.

I bin towin' you five months, you black Portugee. Show me some money or say goo'-by. Me fer the steam-trawls—they got money." He continued to recede and diminish, hanging over the white turmoil of his wake, immobile and scornful.

The skipper watched him for a time, his arms still suspended in the air. Then he turned and kicked Anthony heavily.

"Didn't I tell you beat eet, ey? You—you—I'll feex you, all right."

He tramped off and let himself down the companion, one baleful eye hanging over the house to the last. Anthony began to laugh. A wreath of spray flung over the rail and drove in his upturned face, and he laughed harder than ever. One of the men, slicing bait on the house, stabbed his knife into the bait-board and came forward to stare down at the laughing boy. Others followed and stood in a wondering ring. It was a queer enough spectacle, to be sure—that slight, sallow boy with the big eyes, half lying in the middle of the sunlit deck, laughing at nothing. The skipper stuck out his head, aft, to utter his sinister prophecy, "You wait—I'll feex you—pretty queek, all right."

The sun lifted higher and higher over the sky-line, the vessel lost the last faint loom of the land and shouldered on, hour after hour, into the blue east. Anthony sat on that coil of Manila which had been his sleeping-place and watched the water and the smooth yellow sweep of the main-

sail, with its rows of reefing-points, like a musician's fingers practising interminable scales. He was shaken by an almost savage pleasure in the play of color against color—the garish pattern of men at work about the after-house, wearing sweaters of green and purple and orange, and the copper of oil-clothing welding the whole together.

And there was the master of the vessel, with his derby hat turned green by hard weathers. Anthony recollected that it was the master who was going to perform some unthinkable atrocity termed "feexing." Anthony was not impressed, hardly interested. He was aware that the master approached on heavy boots; that the boots halted behind him; that the staccato of knives on the bait-board had ceased. But he continued to scrutinize the sky-line with interest. It was as though a high authority, ancient and irrevocable, handed down through generations, resided within him. So far he had come already from the Wait maples.

Still there was no sound. Anthony began to fidget slightly on the coil. He was not quite so sure. The silence stretched out and became intolerable. An abrupt and overwhelming anger came into Anthony, not the old, unhealthy rancor, but the sort of emotion which leads men to break things and be sorry afterward. He wheeled and flung out an imperious finger.

"Well—*well*—what do *you* want?"

The finger wavered and fell, quite limp.

"I deed not know—I am sorree, sir. I—I deed not know."

What in the name of all the ocean's devils did the man not know? He stood there, this huge, horrific fellow, like a boy kept in for whispering, his hands behind his back, his face lowered and very red where it showed beneath the brim of his hat.

The sight of him, so, gave Anthony a feeling of nausea, as though he had caught a hoary philosopher in the act of "tick-tacking" on a window-pane. No, the joke could not be this man's; it must belong to those grinning bodies aft. He closed his mouth and opened it again uncertainly.

"Well, I asked you what you wanted," he said.

"You—you weel not theenk— We are all mad, thees summer. There eez no feesh. You 'ear that towboat man? We are all poor thees summer—no feesh. We crazee—mad. You are not hangry—"

"No. I am *hungry*." It was just as well to carry the thing off.

"You weel heat? Thees way, sir. Your deener—eet eez ready, sir."

He had not eaten since the noon before. The simple memory of the fact made him so faint that he fumbled the ladder as he descended into the forward quarters. A place for one was set on the starboard side of the long V-shaped table swung from the foot of the foremast—coffee smoking in a thick cup, fried eggs, bacon, doughnuts,

chowder, pie—a commander's portion. He had never eaten so desperately in his life. All the time the skipper kept his feet, swaying at the ladder's foot with the rhythmical heavings of the deck. His hands were behind him, his eyes still lowered.

Anthony swallowed the last of his coffee.

"Where are we bound for?" he asked of the mute figure. The man started and grew red again.

" 'Ome," he said. "We go down-cape now."

"Oh! I thought you were going out to fish. I wanted to see you fish."

The master shuffled his feet and turned out the palms of his hands in huge abashment. His eyes wandered uneasily over the deck-planks.

"Well," he murmured, "we—we usuallee go 'ome firs'—that eez, we—" He broke off at a slight hissing note from the galley, and stared in that direction. Anthony's eyes followed. In the gloom behind the companion-ladder he made out dimly the figure of the cook, who had left off rattling his kettles at the boy's first question. What did it mean? He turned back to the skipper and found his heavy face illuminated by a sudden, clumsy eagerness.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, in a queer way. "Yes—we weel go feesh. We 'ave got enough bait for one set."

"Oh, thanks," Anthony said, with the frankest sarcasm. He was beginning to be very tired of

the game, and a little angry. "Thanks, very much."

He was aware of something whispered out of the galley, like a subdued command. The skipper moved nearer by one anxious step.

"Where weel we feesh, sir? Eef you weel *say*—"

Anthony laid down his knife and stared at the man, his own face an unhealthy red. He spoke very slowly.

"Why—you can go to Jericho, if you think best. Please don't mind me."

The master lifted his palms again, as though wishing terribly that he could understand, and turned his distressed eyes once more to the galley. Then the light came back to his face.

"Ah-h-h—you mean Zherico Ledge."

Anthony regarded him keenly. For the life of him he could not pick a flaw in the acting of this lumbering fellow.

"Ah, yes; Jericho Ledge—to be sure. Go there, please."

"But—but Zherico Ledge—eet eez no feesh there. Dry. Dry. Five year—seex year—nobodee been Zherico Ledge for seex year. No feesh. Bad plaze—"

"All right," Anthony broke into the distressed expostulations with a wave of supreme indifference. "*Don't* go, then."

But the skipper's fingers were clutching after him as he scrambled up the ladder: "All right—all right—we go—"

It was after dark that night. For a long time Anthony had half leaned, half stood in the vessel's stem, one arm thrown over the butt of the bowsprit, the other pillowing his cheek on the rail. The vessel sailed free before a westerly breeze: the bows lifted and fell with soft, showery boomings, the intervals varying slightly in duration, like the breathing of a sleeper who dreams. Since the long noon calm the schooner had held this course, two points under the east, far to the north of the customary track. The interminable reiteration of little noises—the wash of water, the titter of reefing-points, the monotonous lullaby of cordage humming windy scales to the bucking of the mastheads—all these voices of a vessel about her business gave Anthony a sense of having been there a very long, long time, drowsing over a stark sea under half a moon.

It lulled his senses and untangled his spirit and let his brain leave off wondering and puzzling. It allowed him to remember.

He remembered his mother, quite small and distinct, like a cameo, as if she had been gone a great many years. It was the first time he had ever really looked at her, and it made him wonder at her. He wondered why she had come out of "behind" that day a thousand years ago and broken to pieces his bit of board with its nails and envelopes. He wished he knew why she had looked so. Not "naturally." No, that was done with. He wished he knew what it was, there in

the east ahead, that made him feel so queer—made his elbows itch to be pulling at something. He reached down and tugged at a bight of chain-cable looped through the hawse. Then he grew very red in the dark, for he was making a fool of himself. Some one was standing behind him.

"You see that light, sir?" The figure, gray and without feature in the dim illumination, raised an arm toward the south. The boy recognized the shadow who had hissed from the galley. He turned and squinted at the southern sky-line. A tiny spark, far and far away, flashed for an instant and was gone. Five seconds, and it came again, and went.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Highlan' Light. Over—beeyond—eez the town—'ome."

For perhaps a quarter of an hour there was silence between the two. Both appeared to watch the distant spark, blinking its incorruptible periods. Then the cook spoke, low, as though to himself:

"Zherico Ledge. Yes. Zherico Ledge eez w'ere they was lost."

"Where who was lost?"

Anthony was aware that the other had come up quite close behind him, but he did not turn.

"She—she deedn' *tell* you?"

"Tell me what— *Who?*"

"Your brothers—"

Anthony's left hand closed on the rail so tightly

that the knuckles blued. He wheeled and stared at the man's face. The moon, wan and high, cut definite, blue-gray pencilings around the skull, making it appear fantastic—crooked—as though it had been twisted with an enormous pair of tweezers. Something clucked in Anthony's throat.

"What about my brothers?"

"Your four brothers? They wen' down weeth the *Pico*—feeshin' Zherico Ledge—feefteen year 'go. And she deedn't—"

The boy broke in. His face, too, was curiously carved in the moonlight.

"My father—what about my father? And there was another brother."

The cook did not answer right away. He stood silent, his head raised. Somehow, out here, one forgot that this man had ever carried a bundle along a hill-country road, with an umbrella of dust to make him disreputable. One felt, somehow, that he was a person endowed with mysterious functions in the machinery of destiny—an incorrigible zealot.

"And—she—deedn't—tell you," he marveled, at length.

"No. Go on."

"Your brother, Gabriel—he was nine year old. Your father take heem for a trip—een heez vessel. They went to pieces on Peaked Hill Bars —same gale lak your brothers. Your mother she seen 'em een the surf—lash t'gether. That's

w'en she begeen t' go queer, a leetle. She was not use' to eet—an inland girl. She deedn't know."

It was almost an hour later that Anthony turned his head. The little man with the crooked head still stood behind him, like a sentinel.

"You go sleep now?" he asked, seeing the boy's motion.

"Not yet." And something in the attitude of the man made him add, "Thank you."

"Why was it," he said, turning again to the dark horizon—"why was it you called my father a killer—that time?"

"Killer? Beecause he *was* a killer. You don' know. W'en any feeshin' skeeper he take, ever' year, mush, mush feesh, then we call heem 'Killer.' You deed not know. Some killer he eez driver. Your father he never driver. Heez men, they like heem ver' mush. An' *heez* father, beefore heem, een the islan's. Beeg killer—all the Braganas—"

"*Tonybragana!* I remember now." Anthony Brown had caught another word without jumping.

"Tony Bragana. Your father, Tony Bragana, too. *Heez* father, Tony Bragana. Your brother—first one—he Tony Bragana. He dead beefore you born—that's why. There mus' be all time a Tony Bragana—the people theenk so. Tony Bragana always find mush feesh."

Both were silent for a time, and then Anthony spoke, all of a sudden, as though remembering: "And my brother Raphul—do you know?"

"Raphael? He come back 'ere. He feesh een the *Flores*. Five year 'go he get catch een main-sheet—whoof!" The speaker threw out his hands in a graphic gesture of finality.

Anthony leaned forward against the rail and pillowed his head in the curve of his arm and stared ahead. After a long while he looked around and said: "I think I'll turn in now."

When Anthony awoke it was still dark against the ports, but through the open door of the skipper's cubby where he had slept he could see the bunks in the cabin empty. The dories had gone, then. He got up and climbed on deck. The skipper stood at the wheel, his legs illuminated by the binnacle lamp, the rest of him a black loom against the sky.

"We are there?" Anthony questioned. "How is it?" He held his breath, with an absurd anxiety for the other to speak.

"Wait—wait—we see," whispered the silhouette. His whispering so, without apparent need for caution, cast a cloak of mystery over the business—made it, without warning, a conspiracy, a stealthy stratagem.

The vessel lay hove to, riding under a backed foresail and main, which fetched up now and then with an abrupt crashing of blocks and the whir

of sheets cutting the air. The swells rolled, monstrous and without luster, out of the gloom ahead, to hang for an instant above the slender vessel, then whirl it over their shoulders and take themselves away into the gloom once more. Here and there a crest spat into the air like a gray geyser, as though it had been struck by some counter-violence. The air carried an undertone of these watery explosions, as if a thousand jets were blowing steam.

The cook came aft, bringing coffee. He, too, moved furtively. He murmured to the skipper, "Seen anny yet?"

"Too dark. Wait—een a meenute."

The eastern rim of the horizon became gray; the pallor mounted by imperceptible encroachments toward the zenith, and a band of fire appeared, low down. Far away the silhouette of a black, writhing swell cut into this flaming ribbon and disgorged a spidery thing that hung on its summit for a passing moment. The skipper's head thrust forward on its thick neck.

"That Geral' an' Tony Lee," he said. And the cook yelled:

"*Feesh*—they got *feesh!*" He clapped his hands. "I knowed eet!—I knowed eet! The feesh has come back to Zherico Ledge! See—how low the dory set!"

But the master only stared at Anthony with a curious, half-frightened light in his eyes, as though he had seen a ghost.

Anthony got to his feet and began to walk up and down, driven by a curious fever. He went from one rail to the other, straining his eyes toward the waxing horizons. The sides of his temples pricked. An undulation of the sea brought up another dory, nearer at hand, washing its gunwales. The sun rose.

The boats were crawling in toward the vessel already, their wooden legs flashing in the sun at regular intervals. One was alongside, whirled there suddenly out of nowhere on a watery hillside corrugated with labyrinthine channels of spume. Anthony ran to the rail and stared down at the two sweating men who bellowed words he could not understand, and ceased to bellow when they saw him over the rail, doffed their glistening oil-hats, stood at attention. Their legs were buried to the thighs under their shining cargo. The oblique rays of the sun appeared to draw in from all the corners of space to immolate themselves upon that seething altar, to shatter themselves in vast chromatic explosions, rebound in colored fragments, and hang, an unutterable halo of cool flame, above the swaying dory.

Something turned over in Anthony Brown's brain. The halo seemed to have blinded him for an instant. His hands were working in each other as we picture the hands of a miser yearning over his money-bags. Then he was aware of a poignant pleasure in his throat-cords, as though they gave birth in ecstatic labor to a virgin word:

"*Bakalhov*[1]*—Bakalhov!*" he screamed, and clapped his hands and bathed them in the iridescent blossom of the air. "Ah, *Bakalhov!—Muito.*"[2]

I will tell you how I saw Anthony Brown—or Tony Bragana. I sat in a little square front room with windows looking out upon a narrow, climbing street of hardened sand, bordered with small weathered houses. Here and there were women with shawls—red or purple or intricately multicolored—framing their dark and alien faces. They gossiped across the fences in an alien tongue strange on the ear in this ancient Yankee seatown.

Within the room another woman talked to me in the same incomprehensible accents. She was a very old woman—so wrinkled and gnarled and crouching that it seemed she must have witnessed the comings and goings of half a dozen generations. Her head was covered with a blue-and-gold neckerchief, and she leaned her gaunt hands on a stick. Above her on the wall flared twin candles before the pictured saint of Pico, in the Western Islands. All the Braganas were of Pico. A girl of seventeen (she might have been a great-granddaughter) stood at her side and told me what the old woman said. It was fragmentary—the tale she told—gently meandering, tinctured with the strong dogmatism of age; but the girl was very beautiful.

[1]God. [2]Many.

I turned my head and looked out of the window and saw Anthony Brown standing where the sandy hill-street met the sky. It seemed a miracle to me that he should be so straight, so sure—so puissant. Even as I looked his right hand gestured quickly, as though he gave an order to some one, invisible beyond the crest, perhaps to his crew—yes, *his* crew—blackened men of twice and thrice his age, who had followed that other "killer," his father, to the swimming fields of fish. And he had been so hard to find in the shadow of the Wait maples, this boy.

The young girl's voice, soft and modulated, penetrated to my consciousness:

"She says she was a queer, bad woman—Tony's mother was. She says after the second gale that took the last of 'em off, why Tony's mother sat every night with her windows open, groanin' and blubberin'. And in the daytimes she went round tryin' to make folks promise they wouldn't tell Tony and his brother what their pa had been, because she thought then maybe *they* wouldn't want to be. And she says everybody laughed and told her how the baby was Tony Bragana, and she ought to be ashamed of herself, carrying on that way. Then she says you ought to have seen her scowl. And one night she's gone with the babies, without saying nothing to a soul. She says she was a queer, bad woman, and—" The voice trailed into a silence without point.

"Tell her, for me," I said, without moving my eyes from the boyish figure on the hill—"tell her for me—not—*bad*."

But the girl did not interpret. I looked around to find her eyes, too, filmed with the inscrutable speculations of youth, fixed upon Anthony Brown—a gray-blue silhouette, now, against the yellow sky of evening.

A DEVIL OF A FELLOW

HE had always been spoiled, by men, and especially by women. Even in the name they called him in Portuguese Old Harbor, down cape, there was a ring of irrepressible triumph—"Va Di! Va Di!"—as it were, "a devil of a fellow," or "a gay bird."

They had been dead for more than half a year, he and Stiff Peter—dead, that is, in the knowledge of the home world. And as befitting one out of the unknown, he returned more magnificent than ever, stepping down the fruit steamer's plank at the Boston dock dressed in a suit of cream-colored flannels gotten in the tropics, between which and the pale block of the Panama hat above, his face showed more than ever swarthy, rich-toned, and clean-drawn, with its crisp black spurs of mustache breaking the line of either cheek, like a brigand on a poster. In his right hand he poised a slender cane, something he had learned in Port au Prince. Stiff Peter came behind, carrying the new straw suitcase, clothed himself in much the same sort of shoddy in which he and his captain had been picked up from the fisherman's

wreckage, seven months before, by a southward-going tramp. Stiff Peter was a small fellow; he had to look up to Va Di; had he had to look down to Va Di the world would have been quite inexplicable.

The pair stood outside the dock gates, staring about them at the heavy summer city, the venders of colored fruits, the hot blue Elevated trains thundering overhead, the ice-carts sweating long, cold threads across the cobbles.

"Here's the country fer you, eh, Peter?"

Peter nodded, showing his bad teeth. "Betcha!"

The master pointed the tips of his mustache and smiled easily at a passing shop-girl. "Say, Peter, I a'most wisht now I didn't send that letter home. Be some sport, now, coming ashore into Old Harbor, like a—miracle."

"Betcha!" The little fellow grinned, thinking that would have been fine. "I wisht you didn't, either," he echoed. The fact that Peter himself had sent the letter, Va Di never having learned to read or write, did not obtrude itself upon either of them. Peter waited patiently, eyes on the cobbles.

"Well, Peter, we'll see a night afore we go down home, anyhow. Wonder who'll be to Schlinsky's? Them boys off the fleet 'll be tickled to see me."

"Betcha!"

Outside Schlinsky's place they were confronted

by a slovenly jointed man whose little, red-rimmed eyes seemed to be looking at ghosts.

"Thousand devils!" the fellow gasped in his long throat.

Va Di straightened the left lapel of his coat and flicked a damp curl from his forehead. No one enjoyed this sort of thing more than he.

"Hello, Costa! How's fishin'—good? Any the boys done good this year?"

"But for Gawd's s-a-k-e!" Costa stretched out an absurdly long finger to touch the flannel stuff. "And is that Stiff Peter?" His eyes wabbled about in a grotesque fashion. "Say, you fellahs is *drowned!*"

He closed his eyes tight and mopped the sweat from his brow with the back of a wrist. "I was onto the *Arbitrator* myself las' fall when she picked up your wreckage. Me and Tony Silva catched a dory-load o' corpses ourselves. The hull o' you's got good granite stones up to the graveyard. And here you come tackin' up to me in broad daylight." He popped his eyes very suddenly at the conclusion, as if to give nature a chance.

"And you never *knowed?*" Va Di demanded, losing his dramatic composure.

"Knowed *what?*"

"Knowed we was picked up, me and Peter, and took to Brazil."

Costa shook his head uneasily, still a little suspicious of them.

"But looky here, didn't— Who was it I sent that letter to, Peter? Mamie Cabral? Say, man, didn't Mamie get no letter offa me? Eh?"

"N-n-naw." Costa's face changed abruptly from pale brown to brick color and his unmanageable fingers fussed with his beard. "Mamie's went—"

"*Went?* Went *where?*"

"Nowheres. Only she went an' got married."

"Got *married?*"

"Got married."

"Onto *who?*"

"Onto that old storekeep, Henny Lake—you know."

"Old Henny Lake with the crooked leg? Looky here, Costa—"

Costa backed away a step, licked his lips, fumbled uneasily in and out of his pockets, and after a moment spoke in a voice unnecessarily loud:

"Come on up an' have a drink, Va Di, old fellah." He slapped the other on the back, crying: "There's other fish into the water, man!"

"You go straight to hell!"

Va Di stood for a long time after Costa had retreated up the stairway, scowling into the yellow sun of evening, his teeth playing with his nether lips, his hands tormenting the frail Malacca.

"They—they's other fish into the water,"

Peter stammered, desperate to shift the great man's humor. Va Di wheeled with out-flung hands.

"Other fish! Well, I *guesso*. Mary Virgin! but I got a dozen girls in town, right here, better 'n that run-around slut that jumps after an old man's money the minute I get out o' sight. Fish? I *guesso!* Come on up, Stiff Peter. I'll show 'em."

He mounted the dusty stairs, with Peter sweating after him, and in the wide, many-tabled hall of the Jew, heavy with the arid lushness of a summer night in the city, he drank himself into a heroic insensibility, so that he had to be carried away to dark T Wharf, in the willing hands of the fish fleet, and dumped aboard a schooner bound down on the morning tide for the end of the Cape.

They opened the town around Long Point, a straggling arc of infinitesimal houses and wharves and spires, all colored alike in the sulphur fires of sunset, with here and there a gleam of clear flame refracted from a window-pane, a whole broadside from the cold-storage in the western sands.

"Seven month," Peter mused, an eye cornerwise on the silent man beside him in the bows. "Seven month; and it's like yiste'day—er mebby ten, twenty year, lookin' at it another way, eh, Cap'n?"

"They'll be took aback," Va Di muttered, rousing himself from his sour preoccupation.

"I'm goin' to see the Silvado girls to-night, Peter. You watch their faces, now. Fish into the water—I guesso." He fell into another silence, broken only by the faint rustle of the cutwater and the tiny crescendo of men's voices as the bow gang straggled forward to make the anchor ready. The fleet at mooring drifted nearer, spiring purple on a mat of pellucid gold.

"I see Maya's shifted his offshore trap," Peter struggled patiently.

The tide was low when the dories came ashore, leaving a wide stretch of flats, soggy, half-reflecting. Two of the crew, to tell of it afterward, carried Va Di on their shoulders and saved his white shoes from the wet, their own boots leaving tiny lakes behind, full of yellow sky. A bare-legged girl with a clam-rake in her hand turned curiously as she crossed in front of them, opened her eyes wider, ran away blushing richly, the damp skirts flinging about her knees.

Va Di called after her: "Ai there, you Angie! You watch out for me."

People began to come out on the stranded wharves; some padded across the flats, hallooing to one another. At the "rising," Va Di kicked to be let down, and stood with the great hat held dramatically across his breast, watching the townspeople converging upon him. A party of summer visitors from the East End passed in a motor; one of them, a handsome woman of forty or so, smiled amusedly at the figure, flushed and

tightened her lips as she found her smile returned with a shocking candor, made to pluck her companion's sleeve, thought better of it, lowered her eyes to her lap, and so whirled on into nothingness.

"Le' me alone," Va Di cried with a sudden ferocity. "Peter, gi' me that dress-suit case." Grasping the shiny thing he wheeled and strode away into the mouth of a lane, leaving lips and eyes wondering behind him.

The day died very suddenly now. Passing beneath the willows that hung out of Ma Deutra's chicken-pen, it was almost night already, cool and struck through with the acrid fetor of the roots; and when he came out beyond, the world's color had changed perceptibly, its passion chilled by the faint white influence of the moon. Turning into the back street, he paused before a small weathered building with "Henry Lake, Merchandise & Provisions" lettered across the false front.

"Shut up a'ready," he mused, with a hard-won sneer. "Stays home of evenin's *now*—the old bastard. I'll wring his dried-up neck—You watch."

He moved on again, smoothing out his coat-folds and tipping the Panama further back and to the side, for he had to pass the house now. The perfectly inexplicable thing was that he should find himself so upset over Mamie Cabral—*Mamie Cabral*—a good-enough girl, but . . . He

walked along the white pickets of the fence, shoulders squared back, heartrending chin thrust forward in a heroic preoccupation, eyes fastened on the moon where Fergus's willows chopped it into ragged white fragments. But, somehow, he could not get past the gate; he faltered there, set down the suitcase, and leaned his elbows on the posts.

Through all the years of his boyhood he had played around that house of Lake's; later he had stalked past it going to or from his various vessels. And yet he could not have told any one definitely what it looked like. He retained a dim impression of a grape-vine, that was all. Now he looked at it for the first time with eyes of interest, intense glowering interest. The vine, shooting thick and rough from the ground near the front door and sprawling haphazard over the dimming whiteness of the walls till it came to the semi-restraint of a pergola, touched the man's ponderous imagination and made him think of a snake, or a kind of guardian dragon.

"And them two are in there," he mumbled to himself. "Into the dark." He leaned still more heavily on the gate-post, his garments melting into the luminous streak of the fence, his dark, working face invisible against a further hedge, only that monstrous exotic bloom of a hat hanging in the dusk, air-sustained

"Tony! Oh—Oh, Tony Va Di!"

The low cry came from the side of the house

where a bay window sheltered beneath the vine-strangled pergola. Va Di stood up rigid, leaning slightly backward as if before a blow, his tongue running over his lips. He muttered, "Name of God!"

The cry repeated itself, half in appeal, half ecstatic.

"Ton'! Ton'!"

Opening the gate, careless now of who might see or hear him, he strode along the nasturtium-bordered walk and stood beneath the pergola, staring at the window slightly above the level of his head.

She was kneeling inside, so that no more than her head was visible against the interior darkness, and her forearms crossed on the sill, bare and brown and sweetly modeled. The last dim effulgence of the sunset warmed her right cheek, the other was chilled by the waxing power of the moon—like the two phases of a man's passion. Neither seemed to have any words, save those scared, triumphant articulations of their eyes. So they gazed at each other for a long time, while the knotted shadows of the vine established themselves upon the ground and the house-side, austere and grotesque.

A slow bewilderment took hold of Va Di; something began to flutter in the back of his brain, an intolerable, weightless thudding, and the pupils of his eyes dilated curiously. He could not understand. He had an instinctive

"You—got it—then?"

She nodded slowly.

"I didn't tell nobody. Why? I don't know, Ton'. But then I prayed to all the saints that he would die, and to the Blessed Virgin, and even to Christ Hisself—and three days ago he fell off Maya's wharf and drownded."

"O-o-oh!" It was not tears now that wet his cheeks, but sweat, released suddenly from its pores. "They can't git—you—for—*that*."

"They can't. *They* can't. No. But—"

For all the frightful, occult implication of her words, her eyes were still level and unfrightened, full of a deep, transfigured calm. Va Di could not live up to that; without ceasing he crossed himself and looked out of the corners of his eyes, as though fearful of beholding in that moon-checkered nook the form of a black, relentless priest.

"Oh, Ton'!" she called, softly. He had to look at her, and even the cold exhalations of the night light could not kill the color sweeping her cheeks. He became aware of her hand reaching out to him, wavering close before him; heedless of all things else, earthly and unearthly, he took it in his own and turned it over and kissed the palm —kissed it over and over again till it smothered him.

"Mamie!" he cried, searching her face with his reckless eyes. "You're mine, ain't you, Mame? Ain't you?" He came nearer and stood on tiptoe

to draw down her lips, but she went white at that and pulled back, fluttering her free hand over her bosom.

"Ton'—Ton'! Don't! I—I ain't—smart—Tony."

He stood perfectly quiet for a moment, as if struck there in stone by a flash of some Medusa-head. After a time, becoming aware that he still held the girl's hand in his, he let it drop abruptly. He began working his lips, as if they were stiff from long disuse. His face was yellow and hard.

"The hell you say!"

Turning away, he walked around the corner of the house, a singular woodenness in his knees. But he returned immediately to lean against the upright and confront her with his blighted rancor.

"You didn't waste no time, did you?"

She did not appear to have grasped it yet. Once again he flung off around the corner, and this time he did not return.

When he came into his own lane, gated with clumpy willows and at the further end fading out into the blue-white slope of a dune dotted with rubbish, he saw that the news had run ahead of him and all the neighborhood was out of doors in the dusty thoroughfare, shouting, sobbing, squealing. His mother lunged forward at sight of him, an old, ragged-haired woman, full of fecund years, tripping over the torn hem of her skirt.

Va Di glowered at her, holding her off with his strong hands. She had been handsome once

too; even now there were fine foundation-lines which the folds of her cheeks, red and rutted like a rooster's wattles, could not altogether hide.

"Ma!" he cried, of a sudden. "Ma, I'm back." Folding her in his arms, he patted her back with a rough tenderness, and wept. Then all the others, who had come pattering, fell to weeping and screeching and pounding *him* on the back. They got, finally, into the house, a bleak, tall, narrow structure with peeling clapboards without and a pervasion of linoleum within; into the kitchen, full of all the essentials of life, a stove, a pump, a lithograph of the Virgin, a mahogany wardrobe leaking cornmeal and onions, a phonograph, cot-bed, chairs, and a table.

Eight brothers and sisters had to be heard; a ninth came running in from her husband's house up-street, her stolid velocity not in the least hampered by the protuberance under her shawl, understood to be a nursing infant, miraculously adhesive.

"You'll git the house painted," she murmured, with a hint of severity, to Angelina, seventeen, and in high school.

"Yeh." Angelina had thought of that herself, having callers.

His mother busied herself in an oily nimbus above the stove, frying a *linguisa* and other things, watching her first-born all the while with convulsive tremors about her mouth which made her appear to grin, at intervals, idiotically.

Va Di pounded the red table-cloth with the butt of his knife.

"Ma, git a move onto that. 'Ain't I told you I'm hungry?"

"Well, ain't I hurryin'?" The old woman made the *linguisa* crackle by poking it with a knife.

Va Di rubbed the back of his hand across his lips and justified himself. "Well, I'm hungry."

He ate in silence, only once raising his voice, and his hands, to bid the company be quiet. "You make me nervous," he cried. After he had finished he got up and dusted the crumbs off his fine clothes, scratching an old spot with a thumb-nail and rubbing it with his coat-cuff, ran a hand through his straight, black hair, and lounged to the front door. His mother called after him, with a curious cluck in her voice.

"Where you goin', son?"

"Aw, see the town."

But he got no farther than the step to the gate, where he leaned on his elbows and gloomed at the roofs across the lane. Curious ones passed, turned back, cleared their throats, and, seeing his face, did not speak.

"A kid," he mumbled in his throat. "A kid off o' that crooked-legged old sow." And after another sour silence: "I never remembered what a good-looker she was. Say! And crazy about me. But . . . Hell!"

The moon swam high over the end of the lane,

filling the dusty passage with its effulgent silver. The clear notes of town hall telling eleven floated across the huddled dwellings, and Va Di, wondering at the hour, looked about to find all the windows dark in the lane, save one toward the street end where a mandolin twinkled an Island melody. A solitary figure moved in the vista, coming nearer, a girl, dark-faced and with her dark hair piled on either side of her ears, wearing a white linen skirt and a crimson sweater. Opposite Va Di's gate she paused to kick a twig lying in the dust and discovered the man with a slight start.

"I heard you're back," she said, drifting easily nearer. "Glad t' see you."

The man smoothed his mustache. "Hullo, Mary! Didn't 'spect to see me again, eh, girlie? How's things?"

"Lookin' up, *now*." She leaned against the other side of the fence, smiling and fussing idly with her hair, her eyes lowered demurely. By and by she raised them, nonplussed by his failure to go on, and found him staring at the sky as if he had forgotten she was there. She drifted away, after a time, flinging her shoulders a little, and once looking back with a wounded, malignant expression.

Va Di shook himself and stared after her, moved by a faint sensation of regret. "I must be turnin' foolish," he muttered to himself.

For a moment he thought she was coming

back, and straightened up with a not unaccountable thrill. But then he sank down again, recognizing old Baldy Minn by a faint flapping of soles, many sizes too large for her, on the dust. Baldy Minn had a wide, gelatinous person, forever billowing and breaking against the precarious dams of her clothing when she moved about; a silky gray beard blurred the contour of her chin; her small eyes floated in a brownish liquor, prying, inquisitorial, continually suspicious of women's figures, seeming to say: "Mmmm—so you're at it again. Don't lie about it, because you can't fool *me*." A most horrible old woman. She came flapping through the moonlight and stopped in front of the gate.

"Ai, ai!" she greeted, in a strong, bubbly voice. "They telled me you're back, Va Di. Too much f' the devil, was y'u? Well, blessed saints take pity onto the maids, if they's any lef'. . . . Is y'r ma up?"

"I dunno." Va Di was a little afraid of this woman, and disliked her accordingly. "I'll take a look," he mumbled, after enduring her eyes for a moment. He turned to the door and called: "Ma! Hey there, *ma!*"

A sudden faint crash sounded from the other end of the house, as if some one had started out of a doze and knocked something over.

"Huh, Tony! That you, Tony?"

"A'right," Va Di grumbled. "You c'n go in, Baldy Minn. . . . Say—" He peered at the

bundle swinging in her hand, an old shawl full and exuding ragged ends of things. "Say, what you want, this time o' night?"

The old crone turned within the entry and winked a leering eye. "That big kittle o' y'r ma's," she bubbled.

"Oh! O-o-oh, I git y'u! Who is it this time, Baldy Minn?"

The woman grinned and flapped a hand at him with a horrible coyness.

"None o' your beezness, *any*how."

After a time, driven by an unaccountable restlessness, he moved into the house, felt his way softly along a wall, and stood in what had been meant for the dining-room. The air was heavy and sour with the sleeping of the three younger boys, but the door was open a crack into the kitchen, and in the lean, bright aperture he could see Baldy Minn's face with all its dew-laps shivering.

"I knowed it all along," she was saying. "I knowed she'd never carry it—ugh-ugh—not outa that old crook-leg."

The boards groaned ever so slightly beneath Va Di's heels.

His mother's voice came through the crack, heavy with the burden of ages.

"I've hear of seven-monthers livin'."

"I kep' one myself." The midwife's lips sucked in and exploded with a suggestion of defiance. "Mis' Deutra claims she kep' one

oncet, but she never. Sam Raphael's boy's a seven-monther an' *I* kep' *him*, an' don' you let nobody tell y'u diff'nt, Annie. . . . But a six-monther—ugh-ugh. No."

Va Di's mother had borne sixteen and brought up ten. He heard her now, moaning gently through her apron: "Well, well, I don't know—I don't know. . . . I go 'long with you, Baldy Minn. Poor thing! Poor thing! I put my shawl, go 'long with you, Baldy Minn."

"Naw; ain't no need, Annie. I got Angie Bragg up there now, an' Rosie Courier's there, anyhow. Gimme the kittle. She ought to be comin' 'long now. Rosie come down two hour ago." She stood for a moment ringing the huge kettle with a thumb-nail. "Won'er what started her up. She 'ain't fell or nothin' *I* hear of. Well . . ."

She flapped away along the dark hall, not a yard from the silent man, humming and bubbling between her gums. There was a long hush, broken only by the snores of the sleepers and the continuous, subdued moaning from the kitchen, like the chant of a vigil. Va Di went out as softly as he had come in, and stood by the gate, fanning his face with the big hat.

"Damn!" he mumbled. And after a moment, " 'Tain't none o' *my* fun'ral, though."

Putting the hat on his head, he opened the gate, turned aimlessly toward the back country, and mounted the clear, blue slope of the dune,

picking his way mechanically among the scattered tomato-cans and disemboweled bedticks and skeletons of barrels. Sitting down on the crest, he became part of it, moon-colored and still. The night was so intolerably quiet that the ground-swell eating the beaches far off on the outside crept in to him, and he ruffled the sand with his feet because it made him think of his mother's moaning and her words: "Poor thing! Poor thing!"

"God! how that girl looked at me!" he remembered out loud. "She l-l—"

He jumped up and shuffled around; rolled a cigarette, wetting it too much with his tongue so that it fell apart; threw it away. "She *l-l-loves* me," he came out, more racked by the word than ever a child by his virgin oath.

He found himself at the foot of the dune on the other side, his canvas shoes sucking up moisture from a bog. He climbed another hill, drawn back toward the town, and waded across it knee-deep in scrub and wild roses that tore triangular rents in his flannel trousers. Descending into the shadow of familiar trees, he hunched himself up to sit on the shingles of a pigsty, and heard the sluggish animals, whose distant forebears he had beaten with furtive barrel-staves, grunt and roll over in the interior muck.

He took out his knife and whittled the shingles, trying not to look at the house. There was something incredibly fearful about its being awake in

the midst of all the sleepers, staring him down with its lighted windows, profligate of kerosene and tallow. The kitchen door was open; by and by a woman came and leaned in the bright rectangle, a silhouette of fatigue. This was Rosie Courier. She had been old Henny Lake's housekeeper as long as Va Di could remember. Sometimes she had served in the store. Va Di could think of her, immensely tall and tight-garmented, behind the counter, her lean, brown face with its cheek-cords pressing in the corners of her mouth, hovering over his head, righteous and suspicious. Quite invisible as he was in the shadow, he could not keep from cringing a little against the roof as she stood there in the doorway, breathing and resting.

Town hall clanged a single note, full and round, and as if in answer another note came and hung among the leaves, a high, unmodulated animal-cry, torn carelessly from the tissues of a throat. The austere silhouette in the doorway straightened and disappeared.

"O, my God!" Va Di breathed. As a boy he had always been sent to play with neighbor children on those days when brothers or sisters accrued to his family, and so he did not know. He had supposed he knew; he had had a leg broken once by a jibing boom, and he had seen plenty of men crushed or torn in the bad seconds of ocean fishing. But they had always screamed like human beings.

The distracted ululation was in the trees again.

"Don't," the man whispered. "For Christ's sake, M-a-m-i-e—d-o-n't!"

He got down and tried to walk away, but found himself back again, leaning his crossed arms on the sty roof. He had to be doing something, to dull the blade of that outcry, and so he made up an unearthly anger at those shadows moving against the window-squares.

"Damn you to hell!" he mumbled, shaking his white fist. "Why don't y'u *do* somethin'? Why don't y'u *do* somethin'?"

He was aware of Baldy Minn's figure flapping out of the door, a yawling cat held at arm's length. He watched her slay the little beast, make some horrible business with a kitchen knife, and flap into the house again with the warm liver. He knew well enough that this would soothe the sufferer a little, tied with a cord around her neck, but he became more than ever furious at the shadowy transaction. He did not want Mamie's agony allayed a little; he wanted it stopped, definitely and forever. He stood up and bawled after the retreating midwife: "Ow! Ow! Ow!" Baldy Minn turned and peered into the night, wondering, shook the fleshy pendants of her head, crossed her billowy bosom with the hand that contained the liver, and slammed the door shut.

Without any clear transition, his hate shifted from "them" to "it." It was "it" that was tearing and killing Mamie.

"Damn it—I'd like to—" The finger-nails ate into his palms. He hoped that "it" would die—that "it" would be a "six-monther," so there could be no possibility of its not dying. "Her and I would be—" His ravening speculations tumbled on into giddy chaos.

The night was laced with threads of agony, exquisite, racking, prolonged, still prolonged. Va Di reached out and gripped either edge of the roof, as if to keep himself from sliding. He pleaded with it to stop. The interstices among the leaves of the overhanging willows were filled with the gore of imminent day; Ma Deutra's rooster crowed in his hollow house away down a flushing lane. But still that haggard utterance hung over the world.

It ceased. A faint breeze came to life and wandered across the back yards, tumbling papers; a lark, as though bribed and timed, mounted into the sky and whistled his morning triumph; Va Di's head sank down on his arms, his knees caved in to rest against the side of the sty, and his fingers fell out flat on the shingles.

He opened his eyes by and by to find Rosie Courier standing in the horizontal radiance of the sun, regarding him from the other side of the pen. Her face was the color of a dusty boot, lifeless and flabby.

"She wants to see you," she said.

"Who? *Her?*"

She nodded stiffly, allowed the thick, mottled

lids to droop over her eyes, and turned back toward the kitchen door. Va Di followed. In the kitchen Baldy Minn sat beside the sink, her hands working in a huge blossom of suds. The tight little nubbin of hair had shaken down off the bald spot, lending her a curious expression of wildness.

"Was it—did—" Va Di groped for words. "Did it live, Baldy Minn?"

"Did it *live?*" Her eyes rolled in their liquor, her whole person quivered and dashed against its margins, and she grinned at him, closing the rent in her teeth with a meaning tongue-tip. "Did it *live?* Ho-ho-ho!"

He turned away and followed Rosie Courier through a dark passage, smelling of life and death, and entered a room full of sunshine. Within the door a profound embarrassment laid hold of him; he shifted from foot to foot and looked down at the great hat revolving in his hands. Mamie was so white and still and all eyes, and the eyes dwelt upon him with such a spent and inscrutable adoration. He was afraid to look at her; he felt curiously like a figure done in clay, destructible and worthless. Her hand, all the opacity burned out of it, lay on the flowered "comfortable," and remembering suddenly how it came out to him from last night's window, he fell down on his knees and laid his cheek against it and wept the tears of weakness.

"Mamie," he sobbed in the wadding. "You're a good girl, M-m-mamie."

After a little a sound of snickering behind him brought him to his feet, his face flaming. It was Baldy Minn, almost filling the doorway with her oceanic being, against which the bundle in her arms seemed incredibly tiny and helpless. She advanced, undulating and bubbling, to lay it across Va Di's hastily crooked arms, laughing at his panic.

He held his chin stiff and his eyes desperately horizontal. "Naw, naw!" he mumbled. "Somebody come." He turned to Mamie, appealing, and Mamie, moved by that irresponsible humor which is deeper than solemnity, smiled.

"Ton'," she whispered, unsteadily. "It's killin', Ton'—how he favors you. It makes me laugh, Ton'—you without the mustache, *exactly*. I wisht you'd look, Ton'."

His knees were no good; he sat down in a rocker and looked around the room for mental help. Rosie Courier, standing, a black, unimpeachable spire, beside the bureau, gave him none. Her lids were lowered and her thoughts had turned inward for refuge. By an irony, he had to come to Baldy Minn. Dirty, evil-fleshed, full of matter prurient, there still endured in her a flicker of that essential fire that lives, somehow, through all the changing winds of orthodoxies. She had to express it, of course, in her own way.

"You old devil!" she bubbled, benevolently. "I might o' knowed . . ."

The bundle in Va Di's arms became articulate, demanding its primal planetary food. The man's muscles suffered a poignant sensation of combat, a gentle struggle with an infinitesimal kicking. His face became pink; his mouth muscles contracted in that species of self-conscious smirk so hard for others to bear; he opened and closed his lips tentatively, as though they were quite new and uncertain of their powers.

"He's—he's—he's a *s-s-stout* little bastard," he stammered, in all innocence.

THE YELLOW CAT

AT least once in my life I have had the good fortune to board a deserted vessel at sea. I say "good fortune" because it has left me the memory of a singular impression. I have felt a ghost of the same thing two or three times since then, when peeping through the doorway of an abandoned house.

Now that vessel was not dead. She was a good vessel, a sound vessel, even a handsome vessel, in her blunt-bowed, coastwise way. She sailed under four lowers across as blue and glittering a sea as I have ever known, and there was not a point in her sailing that one could lay a finger upon as wrong. And yet, passing that schooner at two miles, one knew, somehow, that no hand was on her wheel. Sometimes I can imagine a vessel, stricken like that, moving over the empty spaces of the sea, carrying it off quite well were it not for that indefinable suggestion of a stagger; and I can think of all those ocean gods, in whom no landsman will ever believe, looking at one another and tapping their foreheads with just the shadow of a smile.

I wonder if they all scream—these ships that have lost their souls? Mine screamed. We heard her voice, like nothing I have ever heard before, when we rowed under her counter to read her name—the *Marionnette* it was, of Halifax. I remember how it made me shiver, there in the full blaze of the sun, to hear her going on so, railing and screaming in that stark fashion. And I remember, too, how our footsteps, pattering through the vacant internals in search of that haggard utterance, made me think of the footsteps of hurrying warders roused in the night.

And we found a parrot in a cage; that was all. It wanted water. We gave it water and went away to look things over, keeping pretty close together, all of us. In the quarters the table was set for four. Two men had begun to eat, by the evidences of the plates. Nowhere in the vessel was there any sign of disorder, except one sea-chest broken out, evidently in haste. Her papers were gone and the stern davits were empty. That is how the case stood that day, and that is how it has stood to this. I saw this same *Marionnette* a week later, tied up to a Hoboken dock, where she awaited news from her owners; but even there, in the midst of all the water-front bustle, I could not get rid of the feeling that she was still very far away—in a sort of shippish other-world.

The thing happens now and then. Sometimes half a dozen years will go by without a solitary

wanderer of this sort crossing the ocean paths, and then in a single season perhaps several of them will turn up: vacant waifs, impassive and mysterious—a quarter-column of tidings tucked away on the second page of the evening paper.

That is where I read the story about the *Abbie Rose*. I recollect how painfully awkward and out-of-place it looked there, cramped between ruled black edges and smelling of landsman's ink—this thing that had to do essentially with air and vast colored spaces. I forget the exact words of the heading—something like "Abandoned Craft Picked Up At Sea"—but I still have the clipping itself, couched in the formal patter of the marine-news writer:

The first hint of another mystery of the sea came in to-day when the schooner *Abbie Rose* dropped anchor in the upper river, manned only by a crew of one. It appears that the out-bound freighter *Mercury* sighted the *Abbie Rose* off Block Island on Thursday last, acting in a suspicious manner. A boat-party sent aboard found the schooner in perfect order and condition, sailing under four lower sails, the topsails being pursed up to the mastheads but not stowed. With the exception of a yellow cat, the vessel was found to be utterly deserted, though her small boat still hung in the davits. No evidences of disorder were visible in any part of the craft. The dishes were washed up, the stove in the galley was still slightly warm to the touch, everything in its proper place with the exception of the vessel's papers, which were not to be found.

All indications being for fair weather, Captain Rohmer of the *Mercury* detailed two of his company to bring the find back to this port, a distance of one hundred and fifteen

miles. The only man available with a knowledge of the fore-and-aft rig was Stewart McCord, the second engineer. A seaman by the name of Björnsen was sent with him. McCord arrived this noon, after a very heavy voyage of five days, reporting that Björnsen had fallen overboard while shaking out the foretopsail. McCord himself showed evidences of the hardships he has passed through, being almost a nervous wreck.

Stewart McCord! Yes, Stewart McCord would have a knowledge of the fore-and-aft rig, or of almost anything else connected with the affairs of the sea. It happened that I used to know this fellow. I had even been quite chummy with him in the old days—that is, to the extent of drinking too many beers with him in certain hot-country ports. I remembered him as a stolid and deliberate sort of a person, with an amazing hodgepodge of learning, a stamp collection, and a theory about the effects of tropical sunshine on the Caucasian race, to which I have listened half of more than one night, stretched out naked on a freighter's deck. He had not impressed me as a fellow who would be bothered by his nerves.

And there was another thing about the story which struck me as rather queer. Perhaps it is a relic of my seafaring days, but I have always been a conscientious reader of the weather reports; and I could remember no weather in the past week sufficient to shake a man out of a top, especially a man by the name of Björnsen—a thoroughgoing seafaring name.

I was destined to hear more of this in the evening, from the ancient boatman who rowed me out on the upper river. He had been to sea in his day. He knew enough to wonder about this thing, even to indulge in a little superstitious awe about it.

"No sir-ee. Something *happened* to them four chaps. And another thing—"

I fancied I heard a sea-bird whining in the darkness overhead. A shape moved out of the gloom ahead, passed to the left, lofty and silent, and merged once more with the gloom behind—a barge at anchor, with the sea-grass clinging around her water-line.

"Funny about that other chap," the old fellow speculated. "Björnsen—I b'lieve he called 'im. Now that story sounds to me kind of—" He feathered his oars with a suspicious jerk and peered at me. "This McCord a friend of yourn?" he inquired.

"In a way," I said.

"Hm-m—well—" He turned on his thwart to squint ahead. "There she is," he announced, with something of relief, I thought.

It was hard at that time of night to make anything but a black blotch out of the *Abbie Rose*. Of course I could see that she was pot-bellied, like the rest of the coastwise sisterhood. And that McCord had not stowed his topsails. I could make them out, pursed at the mast-heads and hanging down as far as the cross-

trees, like huge, over-ripe pears. Then I recollected that he had found them so—probably had not touched them since; a queer way to leave tops, it seemed to me. I could see also the glowing tip of a cigar floating restlessly along the farther rail. I called: "McCord! Oh, McCord!"

The spark came swimming across the deck. "Hello! Hello, there—ah—" There was a note of querulous uneasiness there that somehow jarred with my remembrance of this man.

"Ridgeway," I explained.

He echoed the name uncertainly, still with that suggestion of peevishness, hanging over the rail and peering down at us. "Oh! By gracious!" he exclaimed, abruptly. "I'm glad to see you, Ridgeway. I had a boatman coming out before this, but I guess—well, I guess he'll be along. By gracious! I'm glad—"

"I'll not keep you," I told the gnome, putting the money in his palm and reaching for the rail. McCord lent me a hand on my wrist. Then when I stood squarely on the deck beside him he appeared to forget my presence, leaned forward heavily on the rail, and squinted after my waning boatman.

"Ahoy—boat!" he called out, sharply, shielding his lips with his hands. His violence seemed to bring him out of the blank, for he fell immediately to puffing strongly at his cigar and explaining in rather a shame-voiced way that he

was beginning to think his own boatman had "passed him up."

"Come in and have a nip," he urged with an abrupt heartiness, clapping me on the shoulder.

"So you've—" I did not say what I had intended. I was thinking that in the old days McCord had made rather a fetish of touching nothing stronger than beer. Neither had he been of the shoulder-clapping sort. "So you've got something aboard?" I shifted.

"Dead men's liquor," he chuckled. It gave me a queer feeling in the pit of my stomach to hear him. I began to wish I had not come, but there was nothing for it now but to follow him into the after-house. The cabin itself might have been nine feet square, with three bunks occupying the port side. To the right opened the master's state-room, and a door in the forward bulkhead led to the galley.

I took in these features at a casual glance. Then, hardly knowing why I did it, I began to examine them with greater care.

"Have you a match?" I asked. My voice sounded very small, as though something unheard of had happened to all the air.

"Smoke?" he asked. "I'll get you a cigar."

"No." I took the proffered match, scratched it on the side of the galley door, and passed out. There seemed to be a thousand pans there, throwing my match back at me from every wall of the box-like compartment. Even McCord's eyes,

in the doorway, were large and round and shining. He probably thought me crazy. Perhaps I was, a little. I ran the match along close to the ceiling and came upon a rusty hook a little aport of the center.

"There," I said. "Was there anything hanging from this—er—say a parrot—or something, McCord?" The match burned my fingers and went out.

"What do you mean?" McCord demanded from the doorway. I got myself back into the comfortable yellow glow of the cabin before I answered, and then it was a question.

"Do you happen to know anything about this craft's personal history?"

"No. What are you talking about! Why?"

"Well, I do," I offered. "For one thing, she's changed her name. And it happens this isn't the first time she's— Well, damn it all, fourteen years ago I helped pick up this whatever-she-is off the Virginia Capes—in the same sort of condition. There you are!" I was yapping like a nerve-strung puppy.

McCord leaned forward with his hands on the table, bringing his face beneath the fan of the hanging-lamp. For the first time I could mark how shockingly it had changed. It was almost colorless. The jaw had somehow lost its old-time security and the eyes seemed to be loose in their sockets. I had expected him to start at my announcement; he only blinked at the light.

"I am not surprised," he remarked at length. "After what I've seen and heard—" He lifted his fist and brought it down with a sudden crash on the table. "Man—let's have a nip!"

He was off before I could say a word, fumbling out of sight in the narrow state-room. Presently he reappeared, holding a glass in either hand and a dark bottle hugged between his elbows. Putting the glasses down, he held up the bottle between his eyes and the lamp, and its shadow, falling across his face, green and luminous at the core, gave him a ghastly look—like a mutilation or an unspeakable birth-mark. He shook the bottle gently and chuckled his "Dead men's liquor" again. Then he poured two half-glasses of the clear gin, swallowed his portion, and sat down.

"A parrot," he mused, a little of the liquor's color creeping into his cheeks. "No, this time it was a cat, Ridgeway. A yellow cat. She was—"

"*Was?*" I caught him up. "What's happened —what's become of her?"

"Vanished. Evaporated. I haven't seen her since night before last, when I caught her trying to lower the boat—"

"*Stop it!*" It was I who banged the table now, without any of the reserve of decency. "McCord, you're drunk—*drunk*, I tell you. A *cat!* Let a *cat* throw you off your head like this! She's probably hiding out below this minute, on affairs of her own."

"Hiding?" He regarded me for a moment with the queer superiority of the damned. "I guess you don't realize how many times I've been over this hulk, from decks to keelson, with a mallet and a foot-rule."

"Or fallen overboard," I shifted, with less assurance. "Like this fellow Björnsen. By the way, McCord—" I stopped there on account of the look in his eyes.

He reached out, poured himself a shot, swallowed it, and got up to shuffle about the confined quarters. I watched their restless circuit—my friend and his jumping shadow. He stopped and bent forward to examine a Sunday-supplement chromo tacked on the wall, and the two heads drew together, as though there were something to whisper. Of a sudden I seemed to hear the old gnome croaking, "Now that story sounds to me kind of—"

McCord straightened up and turned to face me.

"What do you know about Björnsen?" he demanded.

"Well—only what they had you saying in the papers," I told him.

"Pshaw!" He snapped his fingers, tossing the affair aside. "I found her log," he announced in quite another voice.

"You did, eh? I judged, from what I read in the paper, that there wasn't a sign."

"No, no; I happened on this the other night, under the mattress in there." He jerked his

head toward the state-room. "Wait!" I heard him knocking things over in the dark and mumbling at them. After a moment he came out and threw on the table a long, cloth-covered ledger, of the common commercial sort. It lay open at about the middle, showing close script running indiscriminately across the column ruling.

"When I said 'log,' " he went on, "I guess I was going it a little strong. At least, I wouldn't want that sort of log found around *my* vessel. Let's call it a personal record. Here's his picture, somewhere—" He shook the book by its back and a common kodak blue-print fluttered to the table. It was the likeness of a solid man with a paunch, a huge square beard, small squinting eyes, and a bald head. "What do you make of him—a writing chap?"

"From the nose down, yes," I estimated. "From the nose up, he will 'tend to his own business if you will 'tend to yours, strictly."

McCord slapped his thigh. "By gracious! that's the fellow! He hates the Chinaman. He knows as well as anything he ought not to put down in black and white how intolerably he hates the Chinaman, and yet he must sneak off to his cubby-hole and suck his pencil, and—how is it Stevenson has it?—the 'agony of composition,' you remember. Can you imagine the fellow, Ridgeway, bundling down here with the fever on him—"

"About the Chinaman," I broke in. "I think you said something about a Chinaman?"

"Yes. The cook, he must have been. I gather he wasn't the master's pick, by the reading-matter here. Probably clapped on to him by the owners—shifted from one of their others at the last moment; a queer trick. Listen." He picked up the book and, running over the pages with a selective thumb, read:

"*August second.*—First part, moderate southwesterly breeze—

and so forth—er—but here he comes to it:

"Anything can happen to a man at sea, even a funeral. In special to a Chinyman, who is of no account to social welfare, being a barbarian as I look at it.

"Something of a philosopher, you see. And did you get the reserve in that 'even a funeral'? An artist, I tell you. But wait: let me catch him a bit wilder. Here:

"I'll get that mustard-colored —— [This is back a couple of days.] Never can hear the —— coming, in them carpet slippers. Turned round and found him standing right to my back this morning. Could have stuck a knife into me easy. 'Look here!' says I, and fetched him a tap on the ear that will make him walk louder next time, I warrant. He could have stuck a knife into me easy.

"A clear case of moral funk, I should say. Can you imagine the fellow. Ridgeway—"

"Yes; oh, yes." I was ready with a phrase of my own. "A man handicapped with an imagination. You see he can't quite understand this 'barbarian,' who has him beaten by about thirty centuries of civilization—and his imagination has to have something to chew on, something to hit—a 'tap on the ear,' you know."

"By gracious! that's the ticket!" McCord pounded his knee. "And now we've got another chap going to pieces—Peters, he calls him. Refuses to eat dinner on August the third, claiming he caught the Chink making passes over the chowder-pot with his thumb. Can you believe it, Ridgeway—in this very cabin here?" Then he went on with a suggestion of haste, as though he had somehow made a slip. "Well, at any rate, the disease seems to be catching. Next day it's Bach, the second seaman, who begins to feel the gaff. Listen:

"Bach he comes to me to-night, complaining he's being watched. He claims the —— has got the evil eye. Says he can see you through a two-inch bulkhead, and the like. The Chink's laying in his bunk, turned the other way. 'Why don't you go aboard of him?' says I. The Dutcher says nothing, but goes over to his own bunk and feels under the straw. When he comes back he's looking queer. 'By God!' says he, 'the devil has swiped my gun!' . . . Now if that's true there is going to be hell to pay in this vessel very quick. I figure I'm still master of this vessel."

"The evil eye," I grunted. "Consciences gone wrong there somewhere."

"Not altogether, Ridgeway. I can see that yellow man peeking. Now just figure yourself, say, eight thousand miles from home, out on the water alone with a crowd of heathen fanatics crazy from fright, looking around for guns and so on. Don't you believe you'd keep an eye around the corners, kind of—eh? I'll bet a hat he was taking it all in, lying there in his bunk, 'turned the other way.' Eh? I pity the poor cuss—Well, there's only one more entry after that. He's good and mad. Here:

"Now, by God! this is the end. My gun's gone, too; right out from under lock and key, by God! I been talking with Bach this morning. Not to let on, I had him in to clean my lamp. There's more ways than one, he says, and so do I."

McCord closed the book and dropped it on the table. "Finis," he said. "The rest is blank paper."

"Well!" I will confess I felt much better than I had for some time past. "There's *one* 'mystery of the sea' gone to pot, at any rate. And now, if you don't mind, I think I'll have another of your nips, McCord."

He pushed my glass across the table and got up, and behind his back his shadow rose to scour the corners of the room, like an incorruptible sentinel. I forgot to take up my gin, watching him. After an uneasy minute or so he came back to the table and pressed the tip of a forefinger on the book.

"Ridgeway," he said, "you don't seem to understand. This particular 'mystery of the sea' hasn't been scratched yet — not even *scratched*, Ridgeway." He sat down and leaned forward, fixing me with a didactic finger. "What happened?"

"Well, I have an idea the 'barbarian' got them, when it came to the pinch."

"And let the—remains over the side?"

"I should say."

"And they came back and got the 'barbarian' and let *him* over the side, eh? There were none left, you remember."

"Oh, good Lord, I don't know!" I flared with a childish resentment at this catechizing of his. But his finger remained there, challenging.

"I do," he announced. "The Chinaman put them over the side, as we have said. And then, after that, he died—of wounds about the head."

"So?" I had still sarcasm.

"You will remember," he went on, "that the skipper did not happen to mention a cat, a *yellow* cat, in his confessions."

"McCord," I begged him, "please drop it. Why in thunder *should* he mention a cat?"

"True. Why *should* he mention a cat? I think one of the reasons why he should *not* mention a cat is because there did not happen to be a cat aboard at that time."

"Oh, all right!" I reached out and pulled the bottle to my side of the table. Then I took out

my watch. "If you don't mind," I suggested, "I think we'd better be going ashore. I've got to get to my office rather early in the morning. What do you say?"

He said nothing for the moment, but his finger had dropped. He leaned back and stared straight into the core of the light above, his eyes squinting.

"He would have been from the south of China, probably." He seemed to be talking to himself. "There's a considerable sprinkling of the belief down there, I've heard. It's an uncanny business—this transmigration of souls—"

Personally, I had had enough of it. McCord's fingers came groping across the table for the bottle. I picked it up hastily and let it go through the open companionway, where it died with a faint gurgle, out somewhere on the river.

"Now," I said to him, shaking the vagrant wrist, "either you come ashore with me or you go in there and get under the blankets. You're drunk, McCord—*drunk*. Do you hear me?"

"Ridgeway," he pronounced, bringing his eyes down to me and speaking very slowly. "You're a fool, if you can't see better than that. I'm not drunk. I'm sick. I haven't slept for three nights—and now I can't. And you say—you—" He went to pieces very suddenly, jumped up, pounded the legs of his chair on the decking, and shouted at me: "And you say that, you—you landlubber, you office coddler! You're so com-

fortably sure that everything in the world is cut and dried. Come back to the water again and learn how to wonder—and stop talking like a damn fool. Do you know where— Is there anything in your municipal budget to tell me where Björnsen went? Listen!" He sat down, waving me to do the same, and went on with a sort of desperate repression.

"It happened on the first night after we took this hellion. I'd stood the wheel most of the afternoon—off and on, that is, because she sails herself uncommonly well. Just put her on a reach, you know, and she carries it off pretty well—"

"I know," I nodded.

"Well, we mugged up about seven o'clock. There was a good deal of canned stuff in the galley, and Björnsen wasn't a bad hand with a kettle—a thoroughgoing Square-head he was—tall and lean and yellow-haired, with little fat, round cheeks and a white mustache. Not a bad chap at all. He took the wheel to stand till midnight, and I turned in, but I didn't drop off for quite a spell. I could hear his boots wandering around over my head, padding off forward, coming back again. I heard him whistling now and then—an outlandish air. Occasionally I could see the shadow of his head waving in a block of moonlight that lay on the decking right down there in front of the state-room door. It came from the companion; the cabin was

dark because we were going easy on the oil. They hadn't left a great deal, for some reason or other."

McCord leaned back and described with his finger where the illumination had cut the decking.

"There! I could see it from my bunk, as I lay, you understand. I must have almost dropped off once when I heard him fiddling around out here in the cabin, and then he said something in a whisper, just to find out if I was still awake, I suppose. I asked him what the matter was. He came and poked his head in the door."

"'The breeze is going out,' says he. 'I was wondering if we couldn't get a little more sail on her.' Only I can't give you his fierce Square-head tang. 'How about the tops?' he suggested.

"I was so sleepy I didn't care, and I told him so. 'All right,' he says, 'but I thought I might shake out one of them tops.' Then I heard him blow at something outside. 'Scat, you ——!' Then: 'This cat's going to set me crazy, Mr. McCord,' he says, 'following me around everywhere.' He gave a kick, and I saw something yellow floating across the moonlight. It never made a sound—just floated. You wouldn't have known it ever lit anywhere, just like—"

McCord stopped and drummed a few beats on the table with his fist, as though to bring himself back to the straight narrative.

"I went to sleep," he began again. "I dreamed

about a lot of things. I woke up sweating. You know how glad you are to wake up after a dream like that and find none of it is so? Well, I turned over and settled to go off again, and then I got a little more awake and thought to myself it must be pretty near time for me to go on deck. I scratched a match and looked at my watch. 'That fellow must be either a good chap or asleep,' I said to myself. And I rolled out quick and went above-decks. He wasn't at the wheel. I called him: 'Björnsen! Björnsen!' No answer."

McCord was really telling a story now. He paused for a long moment, one hand shielding an ear and his eyeballs turned far up.

"That was the first time I really went over the hulk," he ran on. "I got out a lantern and started at the forward end of the hold, and I worked aft, and there was nothing there. Not a sign, or a stain, or a scrap of clothing, or anything. You may believe that I began to feel funny inside. I went over the decks and the rails and the house itself—inch by inch. Not a trace. I went out aft again. The cat sat on the wheel-box, washing her face. I hadn't noticed the scar on her head before, running down between her ears—rather a new scar—three or four days old, I should say. It looked ghastly and blue-white in the flat moonlight. I ran over and grabbed her up to heave her over the side—you understand how upset I was. Now you

know a cat will squirm around and grab something when you hold it like that, generally speaking. This one didn't. She just drooped and began to purr and looked up at me out of her moonlit eyes under that scar. I dropped her on the deck and backed off. You remember Björnsen had *kicked* her—and I didn't want anything like that happening to—"

The narrator turned upon me with a sudden heat, leaned over and shook his finger before my face.

"There you go!" he cried. "You, with your stout stone buildings and your policemen and your neighborhood church—you're so damn sure. But I'd just like to see you out there, alone, with the moon setting, and all the lights gone tall and queer, and a shipmate—" He lifted his hand overhead, the finger-tips pressed together and then suddenly separated as though he had released an impalpable something into the air.

"Go on," I told him.

"I felt more like you do, when it got light again, and warm and sunshiny. I said 'Bah!' to the whole business. I even fed the cat, and I slept awhile on the roof of the house—I was so sure. We lay dead most of the day, without a streak of air. But that night—! Well, that night I hadn't got over being sure yet. It takes quite a jolt, you know, to shake loose several dozen generations. A fair, steady breeze had come along, the glass was high, she was staying

herself like a doll, and so I figured I could get a little rest, lying below in the bunk, even if I didn't sleep.

"I tried not to sleep, in case something should come up—a squall or the like. But I think I must have dropped off once or twice. I remember I heard something fiddling around in the galley, and I hollered 'Scat!' and everything was quiet again. I rolled over and lay on my left side, staring at that square of moonlight outside my door for a long time. You'll think it was a dream —what I saw there."

"Go on," I said.

"Call this table-top the spot of light, roughly," he said. He placed a finger-tip at about the middle of the forward edge and drew it slowly toward the center. "Here, what would correspond with the upper side of the companionway, there came down very gradually the shadow of a tail. I watched it streaking out there across the deck, wiggling the slightest bit now and then. When it had come down about half-way across the light, the solid part of the animal—its shadow, you understand—began to appear, quite big and round. But how could she hang there, done up in a ball, from the hatch?"

He shifted his finger back to the edge of the table and puddled it around to signify the shadowed body.

"I fished my gun out from behind my back. You see, I was feeling funny again. Then I

started to slide one foot over the edge of the bunk, always with my eyes on that shadow. Now I swear I didn't make the sound of a pin dropping, but I had no more than moved a muscle when that shadowed thing twisted itself around in a flash—and there on the floor before me was the profile of a man's head, upside down, listening—a man's head with a tail of hair."

McCord got up hastily and stepped over in front of the state-room door, where he bent down and scratched a match.

"See," he said, holding the tiny flame above a splintered scar on the boards. "You wouldn't think a man would be fool enough to shoot at a shadow?"

He came back and sat down.

"It seemed to me all hell had shaken loose. You've no idea, Ridgeway, the rumpus a gun raises in a box like this. I found out afterward the slug ricochetted into the galley, bringing down a couple of pans—and that helped. Oh, yes, I got out of here quick enough. I stood there, half out of the companion, with my hands on the hatch and the gun between them, and my shadow running off across the top of the house shivering before my eyes like a dry leaf. There wasn't a whisper of sound in the world—just the pale water floating past and the sails towering up like a pair of twittering ghosts. And everything that crazy color—

"Well, in a minute I saw it, just abreast of the

mainmast, crouched down in the shadow of the weather rail, sneaking off forward very slowly. This time I took a good long sight before I let go. Did you ever happen to see black-powder smoke in the moonlight? It puffed out perfectly round, like a big, pale balloon, this did, and for a second something was bounding through it—without a sound, you understand—something a shade solider than the smoke and big as a cow, it looked to me. It passed from the weather side to the lee and ducked behind the sweep of the mainsail like *that*—" McCord snapped his thumb and forefinger under the light.

"Go on," I said. "What did you do then?"

McCord regarded me for an instant from beneath his lids, uncertain. His fist hung above the table. "You're—" He hesitated, his lips working vacantly. A forefinger came out of the fist and gesticulated before my face. "If you're laughing, why, damn me, I'll—"

"Go on," I repeated. "What did you do then?"

"I followed the thing." He was still watching me sullenly. "I got up and went forward along the roof of the house, so as to have an eye on either rail. You understand, this business had to be done with. I kept straight along. Every shadow I wasn't absolutely sure of I *made* sure of—point-blank. And I rounded the thing up at the very stem—sitting on the butt of the bowsprit, Ridgeway, washing her yellow face

under the moon. I didn't make any bones about it this time. I put the bad end of that gun against the scar on her head and squeezed the trigger. It snicked on an empty shell. I tell you a fact; I was almost deafened by the report that didn't come.

"She followed me aft. I couldn't get away from her. I went and sat on the wheel-box and she came and sat on the edge of the house, facing me. And there we stayed for upwards of an hour, without moving. Finally she went over and stuck her paw in the water-pan I'd set out for her; then she raised her head and looked at me and yawled. At sundown there'd been two quarts of water in that pan. You wouldn't think a cat could get away with two quarts of water in—"

He broke off again and considered me with a sort of weary defiance.

"What's the use?" He spread out his hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "I knew you wouldn't believe it when I started. You *couldn't.* It would be a kind of blasphemy against the sacred institution of pavements. You're too damn smug, Ridgeway. I can't shake you. You haven't sat two days and two nights, keeping your eyes open by sheer teeth-gritting, until they got used to it and wouldn't shut any more. When I tell you I found that yellow thing snooping around the davits, and three bights of the boat-fall loosened out, plain on deck—you grin behind your collar. When I tell you she

padded off forward and evaporated—flickered back to hell and hasn't been seen since, then—why, you explain to yourself that I'm drunk. I tell you—" He jerked his head back abruptly and turned to face the companionway, his lips still apart. He listened so for a moment, then he shook himself out of it and went on:

"I tell you, Ridgeway, I've been over this hulk with a foot-rule. There's not a cubic inch I haven't accounted for, not a plank I—"

This time he got up and moved a step toward the companion, where he stood with his head bent forward and slightly to the side. After what might have been twenty seconds of this he whispered, "Do you hear?"

Far and far away down the reach a ferry-boat lifted its infinitesimal wail, and then the silence of the night river came down once more, profound and inscrutable. A corner of the wick above my head sputtered a little—that was all.

"Hear what?" I whispered back. He lifted a cautious finger toward the opening.

"Somebody. Listen."

The man's faculties must have been keyed up to the pitch of his nerves, for to me the night remained as voiceless as a subterranean cavern. I became intensely irritated with him; within my mind I cried out against this infatuated pantomime of his. And then, of a sudden, there was a sound—the dying rumor of a ripple, somewhere

in the outside darkness, as though an object had been let into the water with extreme care.

"You heard?"

I nodded. The ticking of the watch in my vest pocket came to my ears, shucking off the leisurely seconds, while McCord's finger-nails gnawed at the palms of his hands. The man was really sick. He wheeled on me and cried out, "My God! Ridgeway—why don't we go out?"

I, for one, refused to be a fool. I passed him and climbed out of the opening; he followed far enough to lean his elbows on the hatch, his feet and legs still within the secure glow of the cabin.

"You see, there's nothing." My wave of assurance was possibly a little overdone.

"Over there," he muttered, jerking his head toward the shore lights. "Something swimming."

I moved to the corner of the house and listened.

"River thieves," I argued. "The place is full of—"

"*Ridgeway. Look behind you!*"

Perhaps it *is* the pavements—but no matter; I am not ordinarily a jumping sort. And yet there was something in the quality of that voice beyond my shoulder that brought the sweat stinging through the pores of my scalp even while I was in the act of turning.

A cat sat there on the hatch, expressionless and immobile in the gloom.

I did not say anything. I turned and went

below. McCord was there already, standing on the farther side of the table. After a moment or so the cat followed and sat on her haunches at the foot of the ladder and stared at us without winking.

"I think she wants something to eat," I said to McCord.

He lit a lantern and went out into the galley. Returning with a chunk of salt beef, he threw it into the farther corner. The cat went over and began to tear at it, her muscles playing with convulsive shadow-lines under the sagging yellow hide.

And now it was she who listened, to something beyond the reach of even McCord's faculties, her neck stiff and her ears flattened. I looked at McCord and found him brooding at the animal with a sort of listless malevolence. "*Quick!* She has kittens somewhere about." I shook his elbow sharply. "When she starts, now—"

"You don't seem to understand," he mumbled. "It wouldn't be any use."

She had turned now and was making for the ladder with the soundless agility of her race. I grasped McCord's wrist and dragged him after me, the lantern banging against his knees. When we came up the cat was already amidships, a scarcely discernible shadow at the margin of our lantern's ring. She stopped and looked back at us with her luminous eyes, appeared to hesitate, uneasy at our pursuit of her, shifted here and

there with quick, soft bounds, and stopped to fawn with her back arched at the foot of the mast. Then she was off with an amazing suddenness into the shadows forward.

"Lively now!" I yelled at McCord. He came pounding along behind me, still protesting that it was of no use. Abreast of the foremast I took the lantern from him to hold above my head.

"You see," he complained, peering here and there over the illuminated deck. "I tell you, Ridgeway, this thing—" But my eyes were in another quarter, and I slapped him on the shoulder.

"An engineer—an engineer to the core," I cried at him. "Look aloft, man."

Our quarry was almost to the cross-trees, clambering up the shrouds with a smartness no sailor has ever come to, her yellow body, cut by the moving shadows of the ratlines, a queer sight against the mat of the night. McCord closed his mouth and opened it again for two words: "By gracious!" The following instant he had the lantern and was after her. I watched him go up above my head—a ponderous, swaying climber into the sky—come to the cross-trees, and squat there with his knees clamped around the mast. The clear star of the lantern shot this way and that for a moment, then it disappeared, and in its place there sprang out a bag of yellow light, like a fire-balloon at anchor in the heavens. I could see the shadows of his head and hands

moving monstrously over the inner surface of the sail, and muffled exclamations without meaning came down to me. After a moment he drew out his head and called: "All right—they're here. Heads! there below!"

I ducked at his warning, and something spanked on the planking a yard from my feet. I stepped over to the vague blur on the deck and picked up a slipper—a slipper covered with some woven straw stuff and soled with a matted felt, perhaps a half-inch thick. Another struck somewhere abaft the mast, and then McCord reappeared above and began to stagger down the shrouds. Under his left arm he hugged a curious assortment of litter, a sheaf of papers, a brace of revolvers, a gray kimono, and a soiled apron.

"Well," he said when he had come to deck, "I feel like a man who has gone to hell and come back again. You know I'd come to the place where I really believed that about the cat. When you think of it— By gracious! we haven't come so far from the jungle, after all."

We went aft and below and sat down at the table as we had been. McCord broke a prolonged silence.

"I'm sort of glad he got away—poor cuss! He's probably climbing up a wharf this minute, shivering and scared to death. Over toward the gas-tanks, by the way he was swimming. By gracious! now that the world's turned over

straight again, I feel I could sleep a solid week. Poor cuss! can you imagine him, Ridgeway—"

"Yes," I broke in. "I think I can. He must have lost his nerve when he made out your smoke and shinnied up there to stow away, taking the ship's papers with him. He would have attached some profound importance to them—remember, the 'barbarian,' eight thousand miles from home. Probably couldn't read a word. I suppose the cat followed him—the traditional source of food. He must have wanted water badly."

"I should say! He wouldn't have taken the chances he did."

"Well," I announced, "at any rate, I can say it now—there's another 'mystery of the sea' gone to pot."

McCord lifted his heavy lids.

"No," he mumbled. "The mystery is that a man who has been to sea all his life could sail around for three days with a man bundled up in his top and not know it. When I think of him peeking down at me—and playing off that damn cat—probably without realizing it—scared to death—by gracious! Ridgeway, there was a pair of funks aboard this craft, eh? Wow—yow—I could sleep—"

"I should think you could."

McCord did not answer.

"By the way," I speculated. "I guess you were right about Björnsen, McCord—that is,

his fooling with the foretop. He must have been caught all of a bunch, eh?"

Again McCord failed to answer. I looked up, mildly surprised, and found his head hanging back over his chair and his mouth opened wide. He was asleep.

A MAN'S A FOOL

SURE, I know I could do better by myself, only I think I'll stay here to work on the railroad track near this town. You see the steeple through the trees there by the water-tank. And then when the whistle blows I can walk in to the town and maybe I will see that woman on the street again.

What? Well, that Lisbon woman I am going to tell you about. And maybe I'll laugh. When I come here to find her I was savage enough, but then when I see her on the street I couldn't do it. Because I see I would be doing her a favor to hurt her, the way she is now, and all I could do was laugh—like I done that time when I set beside my brother Raphael.

What? No, thank you, sir. I know I could do better by myself. Yes, sure, I know more than these other fellows in the gang, because they are mostly people from Bulgar and Turkey and such places, and I am a Portugee fellow. No, but not a Lisbon; them Lisbons is as bad as Bulgars, almost. No, I am an Island fellow, from the Azores, sir. My father he had a good

stone house in Flores and three shares in a vessel to the Banks, and I and my brother went to priest-school. And another thing, I am an American citizen a good many years; I have voted for President and I am good to read and write English. I wouldn't wonder if I would be a pretty rich fellow, I and my brother, that is, because when we was here only a couple of years together we had the largest flounder-dredger fishing out of Provincetown, and sometimes we would gain sixty to seventy dollars a week, the two of us. Only now I don't care because I know a man's a fool, sir. And when I see that Lisbon woman dragging on the street some night again I think I'll just laugh, like I done that time setting beside my brother.

You never see my brother Raphael. You don't know. You look at me and you see I'm heavy-built and kind of ugly in the face. But Raphael he took after my mother, so you wouldn't know to look at us we was any relations. When I was in America a year, down there in Provincetown, and I sent for my brother to come, too, and when he got there and I was on the dock and give him a kiss on the cheeks, people laughed and says, "We never knew you had gone to work and sent for a woman already, John Prada."

But, no, sir, he wasn't a woman by any means. It was only the soft skin and the big eyes and the long curly hair, and when I got him a hair-cut you wouldn't say he was a woman; I should

say not. They think he was scared, but he was only homesick. He wasn't like some of them fellows who wouldn't care if they was home or in China; he had some feelings. And the worst thing, we had to go live in that Lisbon boarding-house, because the St. Michel's and Diolda Viera's and the other Island houses was full up, and my brother was kind of a clean fellow, and if you know what that Lisbon boarding-house was like, sir! It's all right in a vessel on a trip, where you look for it. But when you get ashore after a trip you want something different.

I remember one night Raphael couldn't sleep. I feel him getting out of bed and then I see him standing at the window, and after a while I get up and come over to see what he was looking at. It was the full of the moon, sir, and I had to say it wasn't like the Islands, where everything's green, with nice stone walls and colored houses. There wasn't much to see here excepting the side of a sand-dune coming down on top of the house, with a bedtick laying on it like a dead animal and the top of a dead tree sticking out. And beyond the hill you could see Matheson's freezer over on the shore like a big box made of concrete, with a high concrete chimney and smoke coming out of it straight into the air, black as ink in that white moonlight.

I didn't say nothing till he did.

"But we can gain a lot of money here, can't we, John?" says he.

"Sure we can," says I. "I and you will be pretty rich men."

"We wouldn't need to gain so very much," says he, "so we could go back to the Islands and have a good house and some shares in a vessel and live there as good as our father, if not better. You know Domingo Tarvis will die pretty quick, and you know what a nice scene it is from his house with the flowers and market there and then the water?"

I see he was crying, and I put one arm around his neck.

"I tell you what," says I. "It's too hot for you in this room and it stinks too bad." It was quite a small room and there was eight fellows sleeping there in their socks, same as on a vessel, and an air-tight stove. "I tell you," says I, "I'll open this window a crack and we'll get a blanket and cover up and you'll feel more like."

That's what we done, and I think it would have gone fine, only a fellow by name of Ventura woke up and feel the draught.

"Who the hell?" says he, and he got up and shut the window down.

That made me mad. I was going to show him a thing, only Raphael feel me and I hear him begging into my ear:

"For Mother of God, John, don't wake them up. I don't care, if only you don't wake them up."

And so I lay and took it and left the dirty Lisbons snore.

That was the largest mistake, sir, to have to go live at that Lisbon boarding-house at all. And another was when we never shift somewheres else when we could have had the chance, because we was so busy all the time and we done so good and got a fellow in one of the freezers to put us up a power-boat of our own to go floundering in, and now, as I and my brother both says, we would gain enough to make us rich in the Islands in no time at all.

Some of them Lisbons done good, too, and some of them begin to think about women. There was three of them in that room where we bunked, Ventura and a fellow we call Scoury Jack and an old man by name of Sousa who had buried three in the old country. They all sail in the same crew, and when they was home from a trip you could hear them laying awake in the dark talking about it and wishing and figuring up what it would cost to send across for some women, enough to drive a man out of his head to lay quiet and hear them. And one night when they had talked it all over again they decided on it to send across for three women, and I couldn't sleep the rest of that night.

I tell you, I hate to tell my brother. He must have took note of me that morning, because he says:

"Look here, John, what's wrong?"

I tell him nothing was wrong at all. But just the same it keep at me and I couldn't get away

from it. It was just a little after sunrise and we was jogging along, with our dredge on the bottom, about two mile to the south'rd of the Race, me standing the wheel and my brother cleaning the fish we'd fetched up in our first dredge.

"Raphael," says I, as if I was just thinking of it, "a fellow's only going to be young once in his lifetime. Ain't that so?"

"That's right," says he, kind of laughing.

"Raphael," says I, "did you hear them fellows talking last night, Scoury Jack and Ventura and the old man? The three of them is going to send over for three women—"

He start to laugh again, and then he leave off. I had to turn my head and give him a look. It was one of them red mornings like you'll see when the weather's coming on to be bad. And there I see him standing on the deck in that red light, going up and down against the sky, and his oilers and his arms to the elbows running blood, and a bloody knife in one hand and a big bloody haddock in the other, and a look on his face like a kid that never know why he'd been kicked.

That kind of fetched me up. The engine was skipping, and I was glad of it and stick my head down the hatch. And now I tell you a funny thing. I decide on it the only thing was to just laugh it off. But when I get my head out it seem like there was some kind of a devil inside of me, and in place of laughing it off I says:

"Look here, maybe it would cost a little money,

but what's the odds to you if it come out of my shares? Eh?"

But he wouldn't say a word. . . . I hove to and we hoisted the dredge aboard, a good eleven barrel of flounders this time, and that was enough. We put for Wood End, cleaning and icing down as we come along on top of the tide. And all the time I keep looking at him out of the edge of an eye and wishing he'd say something or do something and not keep looking at the sky-line astern of us like a fellow in a dream. That's the first time in my life I couldn't get at my brother. Seem like some kind of a glass wall had come between us, so I couldn't come at him no matter how I went about it. By and by I couldn't stand it no longer to see my brother like that, and I come over and give him a good lick on the back, and I says:

"God alive, Raphael, what you think? Don't you know I was only joking?" says I.

And when I see the light come back on his face it was like something had fall off my back all of a sudden, and there I was on tiptoe and there was the surf pounding up white on the Point and the gulls hollering all around the sky and my brother Raphael wiping the back of a wrist across his eyes.

"I should think so," says he. "There's plenty better women in the Islands. Ain't there, John?"

"And time enough to think of them," says I, "when we get there."

"When you imagine them dirty Lisbons," says he.

And so we come breezing up to the freezer dock, feeling good.

And that's all right, sir; it's fine to feel that way. But it's another thing with night coming on again and the idea edging back and edging back into your head what you've gone and passed up. And that night when the three got to talking about it in the dark again—how the old man was going to have a fat one and the other two want a trigger kind of woman so as to look good on the street—when I hear them carrying on that way I couldn't no more lay quiet than I could fly. When I see my brother was asleep I come over and set on the bottom of Scoury Jack's tick, and by and by I says for them to put me down for one too.

Well, sir—I don't know. . . . I hired me a house up to the west'rd, all Portugee people in that street and quite handy to our mooring, and in our spare time I and my brother rigged it all up and varnished it up and everything right. I never asked him to, you understand. And he never says anything; just turn up with a brush or a hammer and went at it with his eyes on his boots, and never a smile or a joke out of him. As I remember, the first word I had out of him all that time was the day I says to him, kind of offhand:

"Well, look here now, and which will be your room, Raphael, old boy?"

"*My* room?" says he, letting everything go and raising up. But then he wouldn't look at me and I see his face as red as a girl.

"Look here," says I, laying hold of his arm. "Course you know—"

But he got away from me and run out of the room, and by and by when I come after him I find him with his head up against the door in the woodhouse, *crying*. I never could make him out, that way. Only of course you got to remember he wasn't hardly more than a kid.

Well, that's the first word I had out of him, and the last, too, and that was the last time he give me a hand with the house, and a week wasn't out before fellows I know begin asking me, "What's the matter between you and Raphael, John?" And I couldn't tell them. . . .

Well, all right. When the four of them come finally, with their tickets pinned on their dresses, we got married to the women in the church there, I and Ventura and Scoury Jack and the old man. Afterward we had cake and wine at the priest's house, and then we take them off home, every man his own ways, and Ventura and Scoury Jack looking pretty sour, too, because I come into it last after it was all fixed up, so to speak, and me an Islander to boot, and then this one I draw, this Mary Cabral, turn out with the best-looking face and figure in the lot. She was handsome, sir.

Well, a man is a fool, that's all I can say.

For a month after that, I guess, I wasn't anything like myself. You never see a woman like that, sir. You'll say I might have know, to fetch over a piece like that, sight-unseen and no turning back, out of a town like Lisbon. But it's just that a man is a fool. Do you know what? After the first couple of days that house of mine was like a pig-pen, and when I finally put it up to her, kind of offhand, why didn't she cook up something or other good, she says why didn't I get some girl in to do the cooking?

Imagine that, sir. And then when she see my face she shift her course, come and put her arms around my neck and her face close to mine, and make her lips up like a red flower, and half close her eyes, and says to me, says she:

"*Me? Cook?* You look at me, you big handsome fellow you, and you talk to me about—*cooking!*"

Sometimes she get me so I didn't care for a couple of days at a time if the house and the boat and my brother and the whole world even should go to hell. And that's the way I was.

Only sometimes I come to myself and feel ashamed; sometimes I look at her, going around the house in her dirty shift and her hair stringing down her back, and I feel disgusted with everything. It wasn't only she was too lazy to do the house; she was even too lazy to dress herself. And that even wouldn't be so bad if she would

have kept in the house, out of people's sight. But no. I tell you I've see her out leaning over the fence with not half her clothes on, passing talk with Frank Lopez on his way up to his store in the back street, and his own woman watching it all from her gate down the line. Or I've see her hollering across the back way to some Lisbon woman she used to know over there, and they'd ask her what she think this was—Silvado's place in Lisbon? And then she give it to them.

"You—!" she yell, and the names she give them! "You shut up, because I know a few things about you!"

"You shut up yourself!" they give her back. "If we was to go to work and tell your old man half the things we know about you, Wild Mary! If we was to tell him!"

Imagine that, sir. Imagine I had to stand inside and listen to her making a disgrace of herself and me, and afraid to go out and get her for fear the children would yell at me to take my woman in and dress her—little kids six and eight year old—and me leaning my head on the door there and saying to myself: *"I'm going down to hell! I'm going down to hell!"*

One day I see things queer. One day she come bouncing in with her hair on end and her eyes sticking out with one of them tongue-fights, and I just stand there and look at her.

"O my God!" says she, hauling back from me.

I just look at her.

"*Don't!*" she yell, and she put her hands up.

I never touch her—just a little push—and she went down backward over a chair and fetched up against the stove. It never burnt her a mite, not a mite, sir, but she set up a scream like she was slaughtered. I turn and walk straight out of the house and down the street, and I come to the shore-front.

"Where's my brother?" I asked some Lisbons tarring twine there.

"Where do you suppose?" says one of them. "Dredging."

"Who's he got to go?" says I.

"That St. Michel's, Tony Miers. Why?"

They all look at the sky and I see they was grinning. I see I ought to show them a thing, only there was no heart inside of me, and I come down and set on the beach and wait.

I set a long while. The sun was going down and the full moon just heaving clear; I see it running toward me across the puddles on the flats. I see the *Flores* coming up along, kicking up a little feather, and my brother Raphael in the bow to pick up the mooring. I see him and the St. Michel's coming off in the dory. I see them aground at the low-water, and then I see my brother coming toward me across the flats. Everything was turned the color of lilacs. I tell you, sir, my brother looked to me more like some kind of an angel than anything else, coming toward me in that queer, shiny wind,

Then he see me for the first time and he stopped. I couldn't stand it. I get up and I turn away, and I come back up along my street and I set down on my step and I wish I was dead.

I put my head in my hands and shut my eyes, and I still see my brother coming toward me in that lilac-colored wind with the water behind; and I think of the shore below our father's house in Flores, and all the Island girls I and him know. And I hear the freezer whistle blowing; I hear it tearing around through the roofs and streets, and there's no whistle like that in Flores. I hear people's feet passing by the gate. Some of them give me a word, but I never answer. It was coming on dark. All of a sudden I jerk up my head and look, and there was my brother standing inside the gate.

"Hello, John!" says he.

"Hello, Raphael!" says I.

I see him shaking all over like a dead leaf, and I says: "Don't, Raphael! For God's sake don't!"

And there we was on the walk, me with my arm around his neck and him carrying on like it was him had done something in place of me. And all I could think to say was, "Don't, Raphael, for God's sake!"

The moon come over a roof and where we stand it was pale as a dead man's body. I look in my brother's face. He seem a mite poorer in the cheeks and his mustache was beginning to show,

but he still had them eyes like a little boy, bashful and full of tears.

"God damn me!" says I.

"No, no!" says he.

"Yes, yes!" says I.

He never answer that time. I see him drop his eyes and get red, and when I turn my head I see my woman standing in the doorway.

"Hello!" says she, as sweet as if nothing had happened. "Who's that, John?"

"That?" says I. I don't know why it was, but I seem to go cold all over. "That? Why—why—that's a—fellow," says I.

Then it seem like I'd hit my brother, and I see by his face he didn't understand, and, after all, how could you expect him to?

"That?" says I, again. "Why, that's my—my brother."

"Oh!" says she, hardly over her breath. She give a kind of pat to her hair and I see her coming down the step. She come and stood beside me and she look in my brother's face.

"Oh!" says she, again, the same way, hardly over her breath. "Oh, but he's a handsome boy! He's a handsome boy." She put out a hand and laid it on his arm, and he look at me and then at the ground under him, not knowing whether to go red or white.

"Your brother?" says she. "That makes him my brother, too, and I think I should give him a kiss then."

And she lift up his face with her hand and give him a kiss on the mouth and a look out of them eyes. And what could anybody say?

Then she turn and put her arm around my neck and pet me and says we would have him in for a bite of supper, of course.

"No," says my brother, looking every which way. "No, thanks. I got to go down-street—"

"John," says she, "don't you listen to him. Come on fetch him in." And there she was already ahold of his other arm. And what could I do? It was my house and he was my brother.

I tell you the truth, when we come in there I was ashamed to have my brother see what my house looked like, and I was ashamed to see what kind of a supper she got up for us. But do you imagine she was ashamed? Not a bit of it, not a bit of it. You'd think she run a palace.

And the way she carry on; the way she make of me! Nothing would do, whenever she come anywhere near me, but I was to have a pet or a kiss. She got up even when we was at table and come around and set down in my lap and laid her head on my shoulder, and I feel her cheek on mine. She could make me foolish over her, I got to say it.

But it made me ashamed, all the same, to have her carry on that way before my brother. He wasn't hardly more than a boy, remember. His face was like a fire and he couldn't tell what to

do with his eyes, like he was saying to himself, "What they got me into here, anyhow?" He look at his plate and at the lamp and then he look at her on my shoulder, and he keep looking at her like he couldn't get his eyes off.

I turn my head sideways to see. Well, sir, was she looking at me? Was she thinking a thing about me? No, sir, she was looking straight into my brother Raphael's eyes, with her cheeks red and her mouth parted a little—and it all come over me.

"Get up!" I says to her, and I didn't say it too loud.

I get up too. I see my brother get up on the other side of the table with one hand to his head. My woman give me one look and then she began to back off, but I took a good hold on her wrist.

"Mother of God!" says she. "*Don't!*" She put up her arm to guard, and I hear her screech like that: "*Don't! don't! My God!*"

"Your *what?*" says I. And then I let her have it between the eyes.

I see her going backward and I see her fetch up in my brother's arms all of a heap. I see him standing there looking every which way, red as a beet and not knowing what to do with her, and her hair all sprawled over his neck and her fingers clawing at his two cheeks. And I hear her weeping and wailing to him: "Don't let him—don't let him hurt me no more, Raphael. Don't let him hurt me no more—"

I give a kind of laugh and walk out of the house and leave them there. At the gate I see Frank Lopez hanging around on his way down from his store, and I ask him what he want.

"Nothing," says he, and he lick his lip kind of nervous.

"Good night," says I.

He come as far as the corner of the next yard, and then he start to hang around again till he see me watching him, when he made off home. After a minute my brother come out of the house. We stand there a spell with our hands in our pockets, looking at the moon and the yellow windows stringing down the street, not saying anything. What was there to say? It wasn't his fault, none of what had happened.

When he went I walk as far as the back street with him, and there I says good night. He says good night too, but yet he wouldn't look at me, not till he got to the top of the back-street hill. And there I see him turn and give me a look, his face the color of the moon.

I sleep on the sofa in the front room that night. At three in the morning I was on the beach to meet Raphael and we let the St. Michel's go, and I come back to my fishing again.

We never says much to each other them days, I and my brother. It was something, and yet you couldn't lay hand on it. For one thing, we never talk about the Islands same as we used to, and we was always so busy with the dredge

or the engine we never have time to give each other a good square look. It used to be, whenever anything come across my brother's mind, he couldn't no more keep it from me than he could fly. But now it come over me one morning, when I see him standing the wheel with his eyes fixed away from me and looking at nothing at all over on the sky-line—it come over me all of a sudden that my brother Raphael had grow up.

It give me an awful feeling, sir. It fetched me up all-standing. I couldn't help myself, but I come and throw one arm around my brother's neck like I used to—and then I never know what to say.

That afternoon when we come in, who should I see but my woman down to the beach to meet me. I could have beat her, to do a foolish thing like that with all them fellows mending gear on the wharf, and her with that blue spot not wore off yet between her eyes where I give it to her. It made me ashamed.

We haul up the dory, and I says good-by to my brother, and I walk up to my woman and I says, "Look here, what's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" says she. "It was just I couldn't hardly wait for you, John," says she. And then I see her looking over my shoulder and she says: "Why, there's your brother! Only you'd think he was no relations to us at all, the way he never comes and drops in on us. Look here, John, why don't you fetch him along

now to have a bite of supper with us to-night? . . . What do you say, stranger?" says she over my shoulder, laughing and snapping her eyes.

I would have stop her if I could. I turn and see my brother right behind me, and I see him scowl at me and go purple in the face.

"No, no," says he, shuffling his feet. "No, no, I—I—"

"No," says I to her. "My brother's got to go down-street to another place for supper."

He give me another scowl and turn off, and I see him walking into a cloud of smudge stinking up just there where a gang of Lisbons was boiling a tar-pot, and I think I hear one of them Lisbons laugh.

"Come along," says I to my woman. I never give her a look till we come up to our gate, and then I see her face like a devil, sickly white with red spots on the cheeks, and her teeth biting into her lip till it was blue.

"Look here," says I. And then I says: "No, you wait till you get into the house, and don't make a fool of yourself before people."

"I will if I want!" says she, and her eyes was like coals in a fire. And then she begin. Why didn't I tend my own business? Why did I always go to work and stick my oar in?

"He was coming!" says she, and she was wild. "Anybody could see he was coming. Anybody with anything in their heads could see he was

just waiting to be argued a little. Anybody could see he was coming!"

She was no madder than I was, though. I tell you I had hard work to keep my hand off her.

"You poor foolish!" says I. "Don't you know nothing at all? You want to know where my brother's going to supper? Eh? Well, he's going to supper with a girl named Philomena Veara's folks. Don't you suppose a fellow like my brother would ever get married? Eh?"

She stick her face up to mine and I hear the wind sucking in her throat. "You liar!" says she. "You liar! you liar!" She make her fingers up like claws. "Tell me you're a liar!" says she. "Go on!"

I never twitch an eyelid.

We didn't say nothing at supper, and right afterward I went down to Tony Jason's cobbleshop, where I and some of the Island fellows generally set a spell in the evening. I imagine it must have been close onto eight o'clock when I come back home, and I was surprised to see the house dark. There was a light in a window across the street, though, and it fall across my gate, and there I see Frank Lopez waiting for me. He was an Island fellow same as me, but he was one of them kind has done pretty good ashore and likes to dress up, always had on a white collar and some-colored tie and a hard hat, a kind of large fellow, but going soft.

He never give me no time, but he start right in.

"Why don't you keep your woman to home?" says he.

He look sick. I see his mouth twisting under his mustache. I ought to show him a thing, but I think best to hold by the wind.

"Whose business is that?" says I, and not too loud.

But there was no talking with him. He wouldn't listen.

"Why don't you keep your woman to home?" he says, again, like a wild one. "A man ought to be ashamed to leave his woman go run around after a young fellow like your brother Raphael—run around bareheaded after dark—without no shame for who should know it—even them Lisbons to his boarding-house."

"Whose business is that?" says I, again. I just keep looking at him. "You go on home to your woman," says I.

He was a soft fellow and he go.

How did I feel? Well, I feel like my hands was cold, and I rub them together to get warm. Then I come up to the back street and I turn to the east'rd going over the hill. I just walk along. And when I get up a ways I see my woman coming over the top of the hill, and I fetch up and wait for her. When she come closer, I give you my word, sir, I think for a minute she'd been having a drink. She never had sense enough even to be scared of me, but she

come right along like a girl dancing in *Menin' Jesus*, her face shining in the stars.

"I knew you was lying," she says, and it was same as if she was singing a song. "I knew it, I knew it"—like that.

Somehow or other I couldn't lay hand on her, that way. I turn my back and look over the edge of the hill, and I see the harbor black as a pond of ink with all the vessels' riding-lights sprinkled over it, and all the roofs of the town under my feet. It was still as the dead; it was so still I hear somebody walking along the front street down there, and it was like it was something walking *clump-clump-clump* around the insides of my head. And by and by I says to my woman:

"Come on along home."

And we come home. . . .

One morning my brother was sick. We had decided on it to go off early that morning so as to make the south'rd of the Rips. I was down to the beach about half past one, setting on the gunwale of the dory and waiting for my brother to show up. The moon was just turned a couple of nights, right in top of the sky, and it make the beach and the fish-houses and the chimney of the freezer beyond look like a picture of night in a film to the theater; everything hard as a diamond, same as you'll see it sometimes on a falling glass. I remember I says to myself: "We'll have a piece of weather before a great while. You watch now!"

I must have set there a good quarter-hour before I see my brother coming down in the shadow between the fish-houses, and then I see he wasn't by himself. When he come out in the light I see he was hanging on to his stomach and his face all twisted up.

"What's wrong?" says I. "Sick?"

"I got a hell of a cramp," says he. "I liked to died a minute back. I haul Tony Mears out on the chance," says he. And I hear him try to keep from groaning.

"What you been eating?" I ask him.

"Nothing I know of," says he.

"You go on back to bed," says I. "You take a good shot of gin and go on back to bed. I and Tony 'll make a day. Now go on."

He go a few steps and set down on another dory and hang onto his stomach a minute.

"Go on do what I tell you," says I. And then I stand there looking at where he had gone a long while till the St. Michel's says to me:

"Well, how about it, how about it?"

"Oh," says I, "that's right." And I give him a hand with the dory.

There wasn't a streak of air; it was like sliding over a smooth black floor. I was rowing, but I couldn't keep my eyes off that town there, laying so still and pale and clear in the moon.

"Look out where you're going," the St. Michel's says to me by and by. "What's the matter with you?" says he. "You sick, too?"

"Me?" says I.

"Well," says he, "I just think you looked funny, that's all."

We come alongside the *Flores* and we come aboard, and he go up forward to stand by and cast off the mooring.

"When you're ready," says he, "sing out." But I just stand there.

"When you're ready!" he give me again, kind of sharp.

I come and got down the hatch to turn the engine over, but then I just set there with my hands hanging down. Everything look black in front of my eyes and my mouth was sour. By and by he come and look down the hatch.

"Well," says he. "*Are* we going to-day, or *ain't* we going to-day?"

"We ain't going to-day," says I.

I get out on deck and come over to hand the dory painter, and he come after me, chewing his mustache and carrying on. He want to know what I want to get a man out of bed for.

"I thought you says you wasn't sick," says he.

"I am, though," says I, and I give him two dollars and he shut up.

We put ashore, him rowing and me in the stern-sheets looking at that town. I guess I could tell you the shape of every shadow in that water-front that night.

"Row faster," I says to him.

"What do you take me for?" says he.

"Row faster," says I.

I couldn't go fast enough. But yet when we get the dory hauled up I wouldn't go. I stand there by the dory till the St. Michel's was out of sight before I would go up between them fish-houses and across the front street and up into my own street, where it was like an empty hallway under glass. My mouth was like a shoe, it was so dry, and I keep wanting to walk faster, and I keep walking slower instead, as if it was a steep hill I had to climb, and all them little houses on each side sliding down astern of me into the ocean, one by one, till at last I come to my own. The moon was full on the front of it and I see the door was open.

I come in the gate easy. I never think about it, but I must have come up the steps on tiptoe, because my brother never hear me and he was right there in the hallway. I see him standing there black against the light in the kitchen door beyond; he never hear me, he never know I was anywheres near, but yet I see him shaking all over like he was cold as ice. I hear him breathing. I hear something else, too—I hear a door open and I hear the sound of bare feet coming across the oilcloth in the kitchen and I see my woman's shadow. And then I scrape my boots on the step and I says out loud:

"Well?" says I.

Nothing move. For a minute everything seem

to fetch up. Then by and by I hear my woman take a breath in the kitchen.

"Raphael?" I hear her call, hardly over a whisper. Then I see by her shadow she put one hand to her neck. "John?" she call.

All this while my brother never move a muscle.

"Come out in the yard," I says to him. I turn around and come down the step to the walk.

"Come out in the yard," I says again, after another minute.

He come slow enough. When he got in the moon I see his face the color of dough and his eyes as round as marbles, and him shaking like a man in a chill. In one hand I see his pocket-knife with the big blade open. I see it shining cold and blue.

"What's that for?" says I.

He never open his mouth, but just come down the steps slow, looking at me with his round eyes and shaking all over. I haul out my own knife from my pocket and I heave it over the fence in the road.

It seem like that fetch him up. After a minute he look down at his knife, and then he heave it over the fence and wipe a wrist over his forehead and stick his hands in his pockets, same as me. We stand there. It wasn't that we wasn't ready enough to show each other a thing; it wasn't that, no, no. Only not there with that woman looking on; not when I see the pleasure it give her.

Oh yes, she was there, all right! Wild horses couldn't keep her away. She'd been scared there in the kitchen, but she forget to be scared now. I see her standing in the door with a quilt wrapped around her and her bare toes over the sill. Her cheeks was dark and her lips parted a little and she lean forward a little like a woman at a play, looking out of them bright eyes at me and my brother standing up there in the moon. The pleasure it give her!

When that come over me the moon turn to blood. I start to walk toward her, but there was my brother getting in my way, with his face gone red and his hands twisting together. I give him a look.

"No, you don't!" says he, and he stammer and look foolish.

"Why?" says I.

"No—no—you don't," says he.

My brother was the tallest of the two, but I was the heaviest set. I could have show him a thing, and yet I stand back.

"Why not?" says I, and I speak low. "Tell me the reason why not?"

My brother chew his lips and look at the ground, and my woman give the answer for him. She lean a little further out, with her eyes as bright as stars, and her voice shake with the pleasure it give her.

"Because," says she—"because he's the best man of the two."

I never look at her. I keep looking at my brother.

"Do you imagine," I says, "that you're the best man of the two?"

He wipe his mouth with the back of a hand and scowl.

"Do you imagine *you* are?" says he.

It come down to *that;* all the years I and him was brothers! Imagine!

The air was still. And yet it wasn't still, neither. We hear town hall striking three to the east'rd, and all over the neighborhood we hear footsteps going down the side-streets and men calling to each other under their voices, men going down to their boats. Manuel Duarte come out of his house opposite, and Frank Silva, who was mates with him, come down from the back way, hauling on his oil-coat while he walk. They stand by the fence a minute looking at the weather, and Duarte says:

"I don't know, I don't know." And Silva says, "The Gaspa boys have went and gone back to bed again."

They look across at me and my brother standing there, but it seem like they never see anything out of the way.

"How about it, John?" Silva says to me. "You think you'll go?"

That was the first I give a thought to the weather. It was beginning to get a little light. The moon was still clear in the west'rd side of the

sky, but when I give a look to the east'rd I see the weather making up over the Truro shore, a devil's own bank of weather, with red running along the bottom like coals showing through ashes. And with all of it, never a cupful of wind.

"Eh?" says Silva.

"I'll take a chance on it," says I.

And my brother give me no time to look at him, even.

"I'll take a chance on it," says he.

We leave my woman standing there in the door with the quilt around her, and we come out the gate and down to the shore, each walking on different sides of the street and never saying nothing.

We leave the best part of the fleet on the beach that morning, and the rest we leave at their moorings waiting to have a look at the weather—all except Duarte and Silva. Duarte was one of them large, sour fellows, always cursing and swearing if he imagine anybody was like to get ahead of him, and I see him and Silva coming along astern of us in their double-ender, Duarte in the bow.

We come along and we come along. My mind was so take up with what had happen that I don't remember much. I stand the wheel with my back to my brother, and he set in the stern with his back to me, and never a word between us. We ought to put back, but neither I or him would be the one to sing out.

We come along and we come along; we come around the Point, we come clear of Wood End. I see the water there at Wood End like a pane of purple glass laid down, it was so smooth, and it seem like it was because the air press on it so heavy it couldn't stir. I give a look astern, not at my brother, but over my brother's head; I give a look at the Truro shore, and there I see the city of hell built up into the sky, like towers. I see that, and I see three gill-netters edging in from the south'rd, just drifting in, because there was never a cupful of wind. And I see Duarte and Silva away astern of us, cutting a big circle to put back, and where they cut that circle it look like a pen of blood drawed over a dark-purple paper.

My hand laid light on the wheel, but I never look at my brother or him at me. It was like that Lisbon woman stand on the deck between us with her deviled eyes and her lips parted, waiting to see which would be the one of us to sing out. But I would have cut my hand off, and so would my brother.

We come along and we come along, and the engine running like a flower. Away ahead I see a Channel schooner, a big knockabout fellow, laying calmed under the Race, with her hull and rigging showing upside down in the water like a picture. I see her there one minute, and then another minute I never see her at all. It come thick, I tell you—it come thick enough! It was

like that weather bank had get top-heavy and fall right over on top of everything, and you couldn't see three fathom off the bow. And how it breeze! God, how it breeze!

Of course we was in the lee of the Neck there, with no sea to hit us—none to speak of. But God knows what it was picking up beyond the Race there ahead of us—once come clear of the Race and all the water in the world piling up and no lee this side of the Portugee coast!

A man's a fool, all right. I see my brother out of the corner of an eye come up beside me and lean his elbows on the house, and I see his eyes squinting ahead, and I see his soft face, so much better-looking than mine, and I see the wet running down off his chin. It come to me it was time and time enough for one of us to sing out. But I would have cut my hand off, and so would my brother.

He did sing out by and by. He sing out all of a sudden:

"Put her up! Put her up!"

I swing her over first and I look to see what it was afterward, and there come the weather-side of that knockabout's hull sailing through the thick not a fathom off our rail, high as a church it seem, a-cruising along, cruising like a railroad train, with half the sails blow out of her. And I see heads come popping over her rail to look down at us, half niggers, and the whole of them with their mouths open to see us bound

out in that, and when her stern come by I see her old man hanging over the taffrail and making signs.

She leave a river of milk behind her; she'd have cut us in two like a piece of cheese if my brother hadn't sing out that time. And when I look at him I see he was mad, with his teeth set into his lip and spots on his cheeks—mad because it was him had sing out, in place of me. I had the best of him! I had the best of him!

God! I was glad! I see him standing there in the hallway again; I hear my woman's bare feet coming over the oilcloth, and I hear her calling his name like she done; and then I hear her saying, "Because he's the best man of the two." And now it was him had sing out and I had the best of him; and I give him no time and I look him in the eye.

"You got enough?" says I. "If you got enough, sing out, sing out!"

"Me?" says he.

"Pretty quick now we'll come clear of the Race," says I, "and if you get scared, why, all you got to do is sing out."

"Me?" says he. And with that he begin to laugh. He laugh and he laugh; he hang onto the house and laugh. And then I could have cut his heart because I see I had give it to him—he had make me do the talking and it was him had the best of me now.

"All right," says I, and that's all I says. I

feel the deck go down under me and I see a slide of water coming down out of the thick ahead of us, and then I know we was coming clear of the Race.

That little boat, that *Flores*, she never was meant for a thing like that—not for what she get when we come fair clear of the Race. You don't know, sir. You never see it breezing heavy like that in a thirty-foot gasolener. She done the best she know how, and I done the best I know how to keep her head to it, but I tell you the truth we was awash—awash, sir. They come on top of you before you see them, it was so thick; they break on top the bows white as milk and come astern over you. And then you feel her give and wallow and slide one side or the other and come up slow, slow, to take another one.

And how it breeze! God, how it breeze!

We come along and we come along, how far I never know—a good ways up the Back Side anyhow—a good ways further than we ought. If we come abreast of Peaked Hill I wouldn't be surprised, and all that time neither I or my brother would sing out. We'd have cut our hand off now.

I give him a look and I see he was looking at me; I see his face through a sheet of water; I see the hate of me in his eyes that never give in. But I see his fingers was blue where he hang on the house, and his mouth blue, and the water

running down his cheeks was like tears running down, and he wasn't hardly more than a boy.

I take a chance between two seas and I lean over and yell to him:

"You got enough, Raphael, you got enough? Sing out once, Raphael, just once, and I'll put about!"

"Go on," says he, and I see him lean toward me. "I *dare* you!"

"You *dare* me?" says I. "You *dare* me to?" says I. I haul back from him and I could have bit out my tongue then, because he had get me there before I think—he get the best of me. Because the only thing we can do now was keep on going into it. Put her about—let her come broadside on once—and we was good as done for.

Never mind, I was crazy now. I never care what happen now.

"You *dare* me to?" I sing out, and I give the wheel a twist and I hook my arm through it and I laid my head down on the house.

It's funny what I see that minute. I see my brother Raphael six year old, standing in front of my uncle Domingo's shop there in Flores, laughing at nothing—shaking his curls and showing his teeth for nothing but just the pleasure he take in the sunshine and all. . . .

I feel the boat turning over under me; it feel like it was turning over. I hear something part; I hear the crack of it over everything else; and I

feel the give. We was rigged with a half-mast and a boom and leg-o'-mutton sail, in case. And it come to me that roll had rack the sheet out of her and let that boom go adrift, and I give a yell to my brother to look out for the boom, and just then something come by, *whhhish!* and carry my oil-hat away. And then I give him another yell to look out when she come back again. But she never come back. I hear one crash, and that was the mast—mast, stays, boom, whole business gone clean over the side and away.

And the water! For a minute there, I tell you the truth, sir, I never believe we was coming clear. I was blind and deaf and dumb with the water, and all I can do was shut my eyes and pray and hang on and hang on. Seem like all the water in the ocean come against my legs, and then I feel something else come against my legs and I put one over and clinch my knees and hang onto him for all there was in me, because I feel it was my brother.

And you know, somehow or other, God knows how, we was coming clear. We had get our backs to it and the deck come lifting out of the water. Not that we was done with it, not by a damn sight—running before it that way she would yaw like a house afire, and it take all the muscle in my two arms to keep her stern-on to the seas. But at least after a minute I could get a chance to look down at my brother, where he laid on his back there between my two boots.

He was cover with drift and he laid still, as still as I could hold him with my feet. But his eyes was open, looking up at me.

And then I couldn't say nothing. Nor I can't give him a hand. The top of a sea come aboard and washed him, all pale green, but yet I couldn't give him a hand on account of the wheel. I see what was the matter—oh, I see what was the matter all right—but yet I couldn't do nothing but hold him there by his oil-clothes, and his eyes looking up at me all the while.

"Was it the boom?" I ask him by and by, and it sound like my voice was somebody else's speaking.

He never answer me, but I see by his eyes it was. It was the boom that time—and it had broke my brother Raphael's back. And all I could do was hold him as still as I can and look down into his eyes. And them were my brother's eyes again, just like I use to see them, them kid's eyes, so brown and kind and forgiving—God! sir! And I couldn't say nothing and I couldn't give him a hand.

We must have come down the Back Side fast. Seem like when we get on top a sea it throw us half a mile ahead, and yet it seem hours and hours, and every minute of it me praying to God and the Mother of God for just a bit of a lee.

I come by guess; I come clear of the Race by guess. I find lee water right under the shore,

and I stop the engine and leave go the wheel, and then I get down beside my brother and give him a kiss, and I see tears running down his face, and they was mine. And I says to him:

"Wait! You're all right, Raphael boy. You'll be all right and you ain't hurt bad. It's all right, Raphael boy. Only you wait here quiet a second while I heave over that anchor and I'll be back."

I give him another kiss on the cheek, and then I tumble up forward and heave that anchor over. It never take me no time. I was back like that. But yet what little sea there was had shift him a mite on the deck, and I see my brother was dead.

I kneel there a spell, I never know how long, without a thing in my head. And then, by and by, I get up and set on the house with my chin in my hand, and I think of that woman.

I set there all that day and I think of that woman. I never know when the wind shift, or when it come on to clear. I see the sun setting over the Plymouth shore the color of a lemon; I see my brother laying on the deck; I see a whetstone between my knees and a cleaning-knife whet bright in my hand. And I think of that woman.

The moon was just coming up when I come into the harbor that night. When I pick up my mooring and make her fast I put that cleaning-knife inside my shirt, and then I take my brother and lower him into the dory and I come ashore.

Nobody was on the beach. Everything was

dead when I carry my brother up the street. All the windows in the houses was black. The moon was on the roofs, but in the street it was still dark. When I come to my house I see it was dark, too, and I was glad.

I come up the step quiet. I come in and I laid my brother down on the sofa in the front room where it was all as black as anything. And after I laid him down I come out across the kitchen and I come into her and my bedroom quiet, and I come to the bed. Then I feel all over the bed quiet, all over it. But my woman wasn't nowhere there.

I call her name out in a kind voice. I call again, but I never hear her anywhere. I put the knife back in my shirt and I come out to the front door, and there I see a woman at the gate.

But it wasn't my woman, though. It was Frank Lopez's woman. I think to myself he must be late at the store and her waiting for him. But he wasn't to the store that night, and it was me she was waiting for.

And when I hear what she had to say—when I hear her telling me in the dark there how her and him—her man and my woman—had go away together that morning—go away on that morning train together—when I hear that I just lean there in the door a spell and I look at her, and I look at her white face and her claw-fingers, and I never give her back so much as a word for the words she give me.

By and by I turn around and I come into the front room and I set down in a chair beside my brother where he laid on the sofa. And after I set there a spell I begin to laugh. And I laugh and I laugh. . . .

KED'S HAND

IT is called Ked's Hand, and it is not unlike a hand in shape, with the knuckle of the sandy thumb raised a little to bear the weight of Huddlestone Light, the fingers pressed together, stretching to the east, and a slender, woman's wrist holding it to the land. People live somewhere in the peninsula, though one would not guess it to look across from Huddlestone, and the mainland folks seem to know little about it, lumping the inhabitants in general as "Ked's" when they mention them. Inbreeding did it, they say; that is all, and that is enough.

At no place except at the Light does the land lift many feet above the tides. It is veined with salt water and rotten with marsh and quicksand. Fogs oppress it, resting motionless on the moors, lending an illusion of vastness to the headland. In season there is a droning sound, continuous from dawn to dawn, of mosquitoes. Nothing else breaks the silence; there are never any breakers, for there are no edges. The land fades out in a penumbra of reeds and grasses—not so much like a hand as like the shadow of a hand held under a diffused light.

Duck-hunters go there in the late fall. In the summer, save for the strip of white beach along the pad of the thumb, the place remains remote and sufficient to itself, a mysterious wraith, never really seen from the main except on occasional moonlit nights, when it seems to emerge from its fogs and gleam with a phosphorescent pallor among its lagoons—Ked's Hand.

To-night a party of people from "The Willows" at Huddlestone were having a corn-roast on the pad of the thumb. Some of them, with children, were to return on an early launch, and the rest were to remain and see the eclipse of the moon at ten or thereabouts. They had built a fire, laying two timbers of a wrecked ship near together and piling smaller driftwood all along between them, so that it made a miniature street of living coals and gave every one a chance with his corn or bacon. From a little way off in the darkness, the moving, flame-colored figures made a composition spectacular and intimate.

Gaspard Kroon, the Gipsy Tenor, was in the center of the farther line where the light was brightest. That was like him. He carried the burden of the gaiety; he was brilliant, electric, full of gesture, drawing in to himself all the tangled threads of interest. He drained himself. On his swarthy, razor-sharp face tiny red beads of perspiration came out and evaporated in the heat.

Gaspard Kroon was the new man. That was

what he called himself, in fact—"the New Man." He had nothing behind him—no history, no moral liabilities, no sense of race; two years ago this evening he had not been able to write or read his own name, and therefore he could win the world.

Hoff had discovered him. Hoff was there, to the left, being quite himself, and tearing at an ear of corn with his wide teeth. Lydia Klein, the editor, was there—and others. Gaspard carried them along. One wondered if he liked them.

Marcia More hated them just now. She sat on the sand a little way off in the shadows, taking no part. Her hands were clasped about her knees. An occasional crab scuttled past her in the dark, but she did not mind.

It would have seemed possible to only one or two people, her oldest friends, that she could hate any one. She had been through the mill of emotion and come out wearing a blank. Her face was like the face of a mountain lake, giving back what it received. Only Gaspard, of all the later people, knew anything about her, and this was because she loved him.

They had been married half a year now. She had wanted him to come down to Huddlestone because nobody knew about the place, and there they all were, after a week, hounds on a warm trail. She felt them tearing at his willing vitality. She knew something about life and about achievement, and she had dreamed of an

old and solid house somewhere, buried deep in the country—quiet, brooding, a sanctuary. Gaspard needed that if he was to endure.

She heard his voice calling: "Marcia! Oh, Marcia! Where are you?"

Rising, she moved forward and stopped just at the edge of the firelight. He came to her, stepping over children with his long, nervous legs, an expression of sudden sobriety on his face.

"I'm afraid you're not having a good time," he said.

"Oh yes. Don't worry about me, dear. I'm quiet."

She turned back slowly to the night, taking him with her.

"You're always quiet," he said. They sat down on the beach with the tranquil water lapping near their feet. He broke out after a moment, as if he could not endure the silence: "Marcia, this place is queer. It's worse than queer; it's horrible. It makes a drumming in my ears. The air's heavy."

She laid a hand on one of his. "See the stars there in the water, Gaspard; every one of them perfectly still and round. It's as if we were hanging between two skies."

"Yes, and look at the mist creeping over the marsh there beyond. My skin prickles, Marcia. I have dreams like this sometimes, awful dreams, where everything is heavy, and the air like lead,

and my skin prickles. I'm afraid of this place. They say at the hotel that it's called 'Ked's Hand.' Well, what if the hand were to close up all of a sudden and hold us here forever, smothered? Will you look at that fog now, with the moon rising through it. How pale the stuff is! It doesn't move, and yet it comes toward us. It's something dead, Marcia. I hate dead things." He held in his hand a pointed stick, with which he had been toasting bacon. He waved it now with a gesture of nervousness. "Marcia, what does it make you want to do? Shriek? Or sleep?"

Marcia bent forward and sifted sand through her fingers. "Sleep's not so bad. Every one has to sleep from time to time."

"*I* don't. Why should *I* sleep? You—all of you—perhaps! You've been doing things for years, centuries, making things. But *we! I!*" He spoke with an extraordinary concentration, his lips baring his teeth, his eyes lowered, his nervous hands busy with the stick. "*I* haven't been doing things, making things! I'm new! I've been asleep in my people for centuries. Why should I sleep now? It's morning, Marcia. The day is ahead!"

Marcia leaned toward him, her palms pressed to her cheeks and her eyeballs pushing gently against their lids.

"What are you doing?" she asked, in the precise and powerless voice of horror.

A crab lay on its back in the sand between Gaspard's knees, its belly gleaming with a moist pallor in the night. The pointed stick, indefatigably busy in Gaspard's hands, entered the belly, and, creeping through the flesh and the nether shell, pursued its way into the sand. The creature's claws, writhing, made a faint rustling sound.

"What are you doing?" she repeated in the same voice.

He leaped to his feet, leaving the creature pinioned. Marcia removed the stick and cast it into the water; then she, too, got up and stood with her eyes the other way, shivering a little.

"It has no feeling!" he said. He was blowing like a spent runner. "I hate things that have no feeling! I loathe things that have no feeling. . . . Come back to the fire! Please!"

She remained only a moment in the warm circle, for the early goers were getting their things together and some already straggling up across the sand-spit, laughter and the voices of drowsy children hanging behind them in the quiet air. Gaspard's face appeared at her shoulder, more than ever swarthy with the red of shame.

"I love you," he whispered. His eyes were on the hem of her skirt. "I'm sorry. Forgive me. It made me go kind of queer out there—in the dark."

She laid a hand on his damp head. Just now

he was not the new man; he was more like a little boy in trouble, shame mingling with a wistful fear of things beyond him.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, and there was an extraordinary tenderness in it. "You're tired, Gaspard. Won't you come back to the hotel now? Some of them are going."

He was himself at that, waving his hands. "Oh, no, no, no! Lydia Klein is going to do a story for the papers. It will go all over the country. She wants to know endless things about me. I must!"

He kissed her hand with a passionate swiftness and was away, virile, romantic, clothed in the sanguine firelight.

Marcia turned and followed shadows up the sand. She was weary and inexpressibly troubled about life. At the crest, where the sand fell away again to the water and the thrumming launch, she stood irresolute between two fires—the boat on the one hand, crowded with noise and life and lights, red, yellow, and green, shining through striped canvas; on the other hand, the little globe of warmth which she had left. She could see Gaspard standing up in the core of it—it must be Gaspard. Remembering the faint agony of the crab's claws, she had a momentary and irrational vision of herself lying there, with a sharpened stick going through her, very slowly, and on into the sand, and Gaspard's rapt face hanging over her in the night, far away. She

seemed to cry out, trying to warn him of what he did, but her voice would not touch him, and he did not understand till it was too late. Then she seemed to see him leaping to his feet with a shudder and to hear him gasping fiercely at her: "You have no feeling! I loathe things that have no feeling!"

She was weak and sat down on the sand. In a kind of mist she perceived the launch moving off, its lights and voices diminishing across the glassy water. A sense of freedom, like a miracle, came over her. The launch thought she was at the fire, and the fire thought she was on the launch. For a moment out of life she was alone.

She gazed over a shoulder at Huddlestone Light, burning quietly in the dark. There was something abiding and incorruptible about that tranquil beacon, like a Christ saying, "Come unto me, all ye that are heavy-laden," and after a moment she went, walking through the heavy sand.

She passed the lighthouse, gazing up at the wind-polished clapboards. The soft night drew her on, and mist touched her brow with sweet fingers. It was no longer black on the lower levels, for the moon, heaving clear of the horizon, struck the vapors with a suave and ghostly radiance. The fetor of land long dead was in her nostrils—a rank, sweet smell, heavy with peace.

She was not going far, just a few steps. Then she would return and sit on the ridge till the

others came across to take the boat. Just now it was something to be lost out of the world; to be for a moment, as it were, neither quick nor dead. Gaspard needed this. If she could but make him see. If she could but make him doubt himself, for a moment, and his inexhaustible fire.

A soft chill sprang over her foot, and when she glanced down she saw water gleaming between tufts of grass. She had come far enough. Turning around, she went back in the direction from which she seemed to have come, moving in a close chamber of pearl. Strange reeds brushed her knees, and her feet were in water again. Something rustled away. This time she stood where she was for a moment, thinking, till a sense of the marsh's muddy lips sucking at her ankles made her withdraw to firmer ground. Mosquitoes, shaken from the reeds, wove the mist.

Of a sudden she lifted her voice, calling: "*Gaspard! Gaspard!*"

She had not meant to do that. Coming from her own throat, the cry appalled her. She asked herself what she was doing, and, folding her hands, she tried to remain relaxed and motionless. Mosquitoes dropped out of the air and settled on her hands and face and ankles.

"*Gaspard!*" she called again. "*Gaspard! Gaspard!*"

The sound was loud and sharp just about her, and then she felt it going up against the soft, impenetrable barrier of the fog. There were

frogs somewhere, and the thing in the marsh near her was still rustling. She listened and listened, her head thrust forward and inclined slightly to one side, but all she could hear was the thing in the marsh and the frogs and the invisible mosquito millions singing to her nerves. After a little she seemed to be conscious of Gaspard's voice, far away and distinct: "*What if the hand were to close up all of a sudden and hold us here forever, smothered!*"

She heard, or rather felt, a gunshot, jarring the opaque air. It seemed to come from somewhere behind her back. She turned and went that way, and when she had gone twenty paces she was free of the fog, as though she had stepped out from behind the drop to take a call at the theater.

It was queer stuff, this fog on Ked's Hand. For no reason it was over there, and it was not here. In a clearing, perhaps seventy yards across, filled with moonlight and ringed about with feathery cliffs of the mist, a man stood on the margin of an estuary, leaning on the muzzle of a shot-gun, his head sunken forward and his shoulders drooping together, as if he meditated.

He had a long, colorless beard, so thin that it vanished like a morning vapor when it passed against the moon's reflection on the water. His eyes were light, prominent, and half blind, but his ears caught Marcia's footfalls twenty yards away. He turned to fix her with his lusterless regard.

Her pace slackened. Folding her hands, she pressed the palms tight together. It was years since she had known stage-fright, yet this was like it now, except that the horror was deeper and that there was no reason at all for it. What was she to say to this composed and ghostly figure? How was she to break the silence of this place? Seconds passed.

"I'm—lost," she managed after a time.

The man nodded his head slowly, seeming to think about what she had said. Then his eyes turned back across the water and he shifted the gun into the crook of his arm.

"There's a boy drownded here," he told her, in a high, lost voice. "They found his hat right here where I'm standin'."

Marcia moved nearer, fascinated by the lambent serenity of the flood. In those depths there was nothing but the moon, round and cold. She felt the dreadful beauty of the place laying hold of her.

"I'm lost," she repeated, and again she had a sense that sound refused to travel in this air. "I—I was with a party."

"I'm waitin' for the body to rise," the man went on, wrapped up in his own speculations. "They say if you shoot a gun acrost water it 'll bring 'em up."

He lifted the gun to his shoulder and felt for the trigger, and the moon, coming out of the water, danced along the blue barrel.

Marcia raised a hand in supplication, but her voice seemed to have gone away. She found herself staring at the water and waiting, watching, cringing. Her pain grew deeper as the silence continued.

The man lowered his gun. "I forgot to put in another load," he muttered. Fumbling his pockets, he brought out a fresh shell and slipped it into the chamber. Then, as though he had forgotten what he was about, he leaned an arm on the weapon's muzzle and brooded out across the lagoon.

"It's my boy Sim," he said. "He was a good boy. Black, curly hair. They found his hat right here where I'm standin'. Sometimes it seems years since yeste'day when it happened."

His skin was the color of old ivory in the moonlight, and his drooping, bloodless lips twitched at the corners with an ordered rhythm, like a pulse. Instead of pity, Marcia was filled with an uneasy dread. The man's bereavement was somehow monstrous, ghastly, dispassionate; there was no feeling, no reality. Growing angry, she grasped his arm to shake it, and then her hand dropped away again, for it was as though her fingers had closed on a naked bone beneath the cloth of the sleeve. He looked at her with his vacant eyes, opaque in the serene illumination.

"What— Who are you?" she gasped.

He answered in a narrative tone, as flat and stale as the marsh.

"I'm Godsend Ked. *Old* one, that is. *Young* Godsend is brother to that one, y'u understand, under the water there. He's . . ."

"I don't want to know!" she cried. "I want to go back to the others. Right away, please! Do you hear? I'll pay you—anything!"

The old man nodded slowly, as if turning it over in his mind, and then, presenting his back to her, moved off along the margin of the water, without a word. Marcia would have said that they ought to go in the opposite direction, and misgiving followed her all the way across the crystal space. But when the fog had swallowed up the moon and made Old Ked a moving blur, she forgot this in the need for keeping track of him, for she did not want to be alone again on Ked's Hand. She did lose him once or twice in the glittering pall, and then she ran, tripping through angled reeds, to see him.

She had no way of knowing how far they went. Sand, rushes, mat of wild cranberry, passed through the dim circle of vision underfoot. Once there was a bridge of twin logs with bits of plank fastened crosswise and a ditch of water shining beneath like the face of a black pearl. Silence oppressed her, and yet she was afraid to raise her voice for fear of hearing his again. He was leading her—where? She had told him she was with a party; now it came to her of a sudden that he had not asked her where the party was.

"Listen!" she cried, catching up to pluck his shoulder. "Listen! Please!"

Her voice startled him and he shrank away from her touch. When he turned his eyes over a shoulder she saw by their dull amazement that he had forgotten she was there. She stood still with her hands pressed to her cheeks while he went on and merged with the veil. Dimly she heard his footfalls receding, a soft *pad, pad, pad;* then he seemed to be getting over something, for there was a sound of grunting, a senile complaint, and the ring of gunstock striking wood.

A light, stronger than the moon, was in the mist; the mist itself rocked with a strange wind, and Marcia's ears were deafened. She put her hands over them.

"He shot the gun," she told herself. It was simple. He had shot the gun. She tried to laugh. She was shivering all over.

Taking her hands away, she listened and heard nothing, not even the *pad, pad* of his boots. She moved forward, curiously blind, groping the mist with outstretched arms. Her hands found the top rail of a fence, gray and polished like satin, and, resting her weight against it, she peered at the ground beyond—and the human wreckage cast down there, dim, misshapen, eloquent of disaster. She crossed her arms on the rail and buried her face in them, and after a moment a sound came out of her throat.

She heard a voice from beyond the fence, by and by, questioning, impatient.

"What's the ruction there? Who is it? What's wrong? Say!"

She pointed without uncovering her eyes. Hearing no further sound, and sensing that the owner of the voice came toward her, she looked up presently to find him standing with his elbow on the fence and his eyes studying the dim catastrophe. She fell back a step, shaken.

"*Gaspard!*"

Turning his head, the man regarded her suspiciously from under the shadow of his slouch hat. "Gaspard? Gaspard who?"

"Oh!" Marcia's hand went to her throat. It was all so queer that she wanted to laugh, even in the presence of death. "Oh, I—I— You're very like— For a moment, I thought—"

"I was Gaspard? Don't know 'im. My name's Ked. Godsend Ked. That's my father there—what's left."

It was like a dream, where nothing counted; his words ran in with the velvet pallor of the night, engrossed, passionless, like a sound of claws, it seemed to Marcia, rustling over sand. She remembered Gaspard and his sharpened stick, and now she almost understood.

"What happened?" she heard the other asking, in the same sluggard voice. "How'd he come to blow 'imself that way? Or did you do it? Or what?"

That frightened her. "No, no—no! He was climbing the fence. He loaded the gun out there where his boy—you know— He was shooting over the water out here, and—"

"Again?"

"Again?" Her wonder hung in the quiet air. She shook herself savagely. "I am sorry to obtrude; I hope you will understand, but I shall have to beg you to find me a guide. I have lost my party, I don't know my way; I am quite at the mercy of anything here. I am willing to pay anything, in or out of reason—if you will only hurry—please."

The young one nodded thoughtfully as the old one had done. He picked up the shot-gun, examined it, and handed it to her, saying, "You'll have to carry this." The barrel was still warm in her palm. She kept her eyes on it while another burden was lifted from the ground, and then, getting between the bars, she followed, guided by a muffled and laborious breathing and boot-soles sucking in swampy turf.

A doorway of yellow light opened before her, framing the silhouette of the two Godsends, and after a moment she followed in, obedient to a word cast back.

The room was spacious, high-studded, done in an old faith of architecture. Discolored wainscoting paneled the lower walls, and above them the plaster was mottled as a shrike's egg with the damp of degenerating years. What little of

furniture there was seemed broken, exquisite, and old. A lamp on a table of scarred Sheraton in the center gave out a brown light, smoked and feeble. Had it been a little feebler yet, one might have forgotten the decay and summoned up the ghosts of strong and beautiful people in that old chamber.

The people there in the flesh were neither strong nor beautiful. It was hard to say how many there were. Like the colorless things on the under side of a field-stone, they sought shadow, inhabiting corners, crowding in obscurity, careless of contact. Twitching, they made no sound. The head of a very old woman was to be seen, and beside it the head of a baby, both of them toothless, bald, the skin drawn taut over the framework gleaming in the high-lights; oddly identical heads, staring fixedly in the same direction.

Marcia, following the gaze, turned her eyes over her shoulder. The dead man lay on another table by the wall behind her back. She saw his boots and the worn trousers above them, flattening away from the keen ridges of his leg-bones. Queer things suggested themselves to her; she breathed an opiate in the ropy air, and for a moment, under the urge of all those rapt, converging eyes, she felt a desire to keep on turning her head till she came to the other end of the table, an eagerness, breathless and almost beyond control, to snatch a glimpse of what had

happened when the gun went off in the mist out of doors.

She got herself straight with an effort that left her weak and shivering and conscious of a personal filth. She appealed: "Please! Somebody! I wish to go!"

The younger Godsend came toward her out of the populous shadows, carrying a bottle and a teacup.

"I'm goin' to take you," he said, with a strain of petulance. "Only you better have a mite o' this first. You're white."

He took off his hat, endowing himself with a survival of gentility, somehow shocking. Marcia pushed away the cup. Moved by some thought or emotion too diaphanous for expression, the man stared into it for a moment; then, lifting it to his lips, swallowed the shot and put down the cup and the bottle beside the lamp.

He was ready to go, but he lingered there for a moment, leaning on his hands and letting his eyes drift away to the other table beside the wall. Marcia waited while the moment lengthened into many, her attention fastened upon the face hanging in the sulphur light, grayish brown, worn like a blade by blood turned back too many times upon itself, curiously dead, and as curiously alive with a still, insidious nervousness. He was as like the old woman as she was like the baby, and they were all as like as eggs in a nest.

He seemed to be giving himself up. Once he

moved, but it was only to sink down into a chair with his arms spread on the table. His eyes, like the rest, kindled with a slow and exotic animation. The breath of the marsh dwelt in the room. Mosquitoes came in at the door, wound the air, invisible, or dropped out of it to sting. A clock ticked slowly behind Marcia's back, so slowly that it seemed ten seconds elapsed between the successive beats. The old woman was speaking in a rapt and weightless voice:

"I 'member. I 'member. 'Twas my own gran'father, Abner Ked. And he come ashore in his dory that time with his mate's co'pse. I 'member. I 'member."

Once, when playing the Southern States, Marcia More had been taken to a negro camp-meeting, and she recalled a moment when something seemed to break in the air, the lights dimmed, a raptured horror smote black faces, and the shadows of the devils of the jungle tiptoed through the pack, shaking them like a reed. . . .

"He'd been adrift two weeks, and he'd eat off one o' the legs, Abner did. He'd eat off one o' Martin Ked's legs. Did I say 'twas the right one . . .?"

They were shaken like a reed. Their blood beat all with one pulse and shadow knit them together. Behind Marcia's back the clock ticked on, more slowly.

Something was busy in her brain now, irrational, untiring, putting away obstacles, lead-

ing her along blind passages and through impenetrable walls, till she stood on the floor of a dream and heard her own voice, as a stranger's, pleading with the man at the table:

"Gaspard! Why are you doing it? Gaspard, dear, what is the use? What are you driving at? Why do you take all this trouble, Gaspard? What do you want to show me, and who are all—these? And why do you look that way?"

The man turned on her, wincing, and all about him in the room she had a sense of things falling to pieces. Something was shattered; an exquisite balance had been destroyed. Faces confronted her from the dusk, masks twitching with a raw and ineffectual anger, like the faces of devotees robbed of their drug by a sudden hand.

She rubbed her eyes. "What am I saying? Why do you look so like Gaspard?" She stretched out her hands, beseeching. "You promised! You promised! You wouldn't go back on your promise. Some one will take me!"

His eyes were clouded and as frightened as her own. She fawned on him.

"Please! Now! I'll tell you where they are, my people, and you'll take me right away. They're near the place where your father was—you know—where he went to shoot over the water—"

Her voice trailed off. And now a new thing, taking shape in the back of her mind, drove her on inexorably. "You remember you said,

'Again?' when I told you that out there? Why did you say—'Again?' What made you say it—'*Again?*'—like that?"

He stared at her with Gaspard's frightened eyes, and moistened his lips with his tongue, as Gaspard did.

"He was always doin' it, that's why."

"Always? What do you mean? Why do you talk like a crazy person? The boy was drowned *yesterday.*"

"It's you that's crazy here. He was twins with me, and that was twenty year—nearer twenty-five—ago."

Marcia took hold of the edge of the table. "But he was *drowned*, you know! He was—*dead!*"

"Some says—"

"*But they found his hat!*"

"Some says—"

"But— But—"

"Some says there was gipsies about. . . . Why?"

"Nothing! Nothing, nothing! You believe me, don't you? Nothing!"

She was consumed by the necessity for making him understand that she meant nothing, and she was conscious of a kind of triumph when his eyes wandered away from hers and back to the table beside the wall.

Time went on, meted out by the lagging pulse of that clock behind her back. Her mind centered upon it, and she found herself awaiting the beat with an unaccountable tension.

The old woman's voice grew audible once more:

"I was on the beach that time, I was. I seen the stump, I did. The stump o' the dead one's leg. 'Twas dry, like a piece o' leather."

That was a queer clock. Its beat, now that she listened so closely, was not metallic, as a clock's beat should be. It was more like a fluid impact.

"Dry as leather. He'd been adrift two weeks, Abner Ked had, and he was thirsty—awful thirsty. . . ."

It was more like something falling on the floor—*drip, drip, drip*. Marcia put her hands over her ears and fled. . . .

Somehow or other she was out in the dark, and mist blew in her face and her feet were running. It was blind work, for there was no light at all now, not even enough to see her swinging hands or the earth passing under her feet. It seemed natural to her that the world should be black; it was natural, for the moon was in eclipse, though she failed to think of that. Reckless of where she fled, the guardian angel of the reckless saved her by miracles. She bruised herself on an invisible fence. Once she tripped and went down sprawling, her face in sedges. Once she found water rising about her knees, but instead of turning she floundered on and after a little the water shoaled again, gave place to mud, and then to turf. The moon came out a little from the earth's shadow, and a phantom light crept abroad.

There were voices, some far off, some nearer at hand, hallooing: "*Marcia More! Marcia More!*"

She wanted to answer them, but something seemed to break in her mind, and she began to sob and stumble. And, stumbling, she came upon Gaspard Kroon, motionless and mute in the fog, and buried her face in his hands.

"I'm glad you've come," she heard him saying. "They're hunting you. The launch-man said he hadn't seen you, and they thought you were lost. They're hunting you. Hear them?"

She would not understand. Instinctively, for the moment, she refused to make head or tail of it. But in the following silence, ruffled only by the distant hails of the searchers, wonder forced itself inexorably upon her, a formless uneasiness, changing to dread. Why was it *they*, and not *he*, who searched? Why did he not call to them, telling the news? Why was he, the soul of flame, become of a sudden so mindless, inert, and still, and why was she so cold?

"Tell them," she begged, with her face still hidden.

"Yes, yes. In a minute."

Somehow or other she knew that he was nodding his head with an assumption of deep sagacity, seeming to turn the matter over in his mind, and she knew what his face was like, for she had lately seen its mate.

He took his hands away and sat down on the

turf, leaving her to crouch alone, staring at him. His wrists hung down between his knees and his eyes were open wide, brooding at nothing. He, too, seemed to be giving himself up to a seductive acquiescence.

"I've just found out what peace means," he told her, dreaming. Languor blurred his words. "Peace! Quiet! To let down and be nothing, and care about nothing. You were right."

She tried to close her eyes, for in the queer half-light it was not the face of the Gaspard she knew, but the face of the brother—the face of the man standing by the estuary, and of the old woman and the young baby, back there behind her in that chamber of degeneration. Mosquitoes settled upon it, but it gave no sign that it felt, save for an occasional twitching at the corners of the lips. . . . She had a vision of a great, marsh-scarred hand curving and closing irresistibly, to claim its own.

"It would be nice to sleep here to-night, in the moonlit fog." His words drifted to her across a thousand miles.

When Hoff and the others heard Marcia's voice lifting in the mist, they turned and ran that way, spurred by a curious sensation of disaster, and found her with her husband, who seemed to be as lost as she. She was so glad to see them. She begged of them with a shaken and pathetic eagerness, "Please let's all go quickly!"

Once in the launch and free of the shore, the two sat close together in the stern. Gaspard seemed dazed and vaguely embarrassed, like a haunted boy. Marcia was weak as a babe, and as a babe she breathed of life. The engine's staccato thrumming was music; the wind of motion coming across clean water touched fire to her cheeks; the continuous, subdued conflict of voices, lights, and colors pulled her up. And she knew that they and she together must pull Gaspard up.

"What shall we do to-morrow?" she propounded, launching out desperately upon the future. "I'd like to go back to town. Would you?"

"Yes— Yes. Town." He passed a hand across his brow and turned his eyes astern. "That's a queer place back there."

"Yes, queer enough. What of it? Places are queer." Her words were light, but her nails were gnawing in her palms. "You must forget it, Gaspard!" That last went on repeating itself over in her brain—"You must forget it—forget it—"

"I don't know what to make of it," he continued, uneasily. "It's somehow very horrible, and yet— It's like a drink you hate the taste of, and yet want. Sitting there, for a moment— You know, Marcia, I— Well—I can't say. What is it about Ked's Hand?"

"Nothing! Nothing! It's just queer, and

you have to let it go at that, dear!" She saw him wince, and discovered that she was pinching his arm cruelly. "I know what it is," she shifted of a sudden. "It's simply that it's old and low and heavy there, and you happen to be just the other things." She must make him believe this now, passionately—for his soul, and especially hers, hung upon it. "You happen to be *precisely the other things*, Gaspard—*new* and *high* and *raw* and *leaping!* Can you see it now, Gaspard? That's *night*, back there, and you're *morning*. Eh?"

She had made him believe it. She had done more than make him believe it, perhaps: for by making him believe it, if there be any meat in faith, she had made it true.

"That's so," he murmured. He shook his shoulders, and color came back to his face. "That's so, Marcia. We wouldn't get along together, it and I, would we?"

Red's Hand had become very faint now, no more than a pale ribbon stretched across the night, with a solitary star shining over it. Gaspard swept it all into the limbo of oblivion with one of his old, volcanic gestures.

"Come," he said. "Let's talk with everybody. Lydia Klein tells me I'm to be amazing this winter, and do astounding big things. . . . Lydia! Oh, Lydia Klein! Marcia wants to hear!"

"Yes," said Marcia, "I do so want to hear."

"ROMANCE"

I

SPRING was born that afternoon, just before evening began to come down. Three days and nights the Equinox had labored, darkening all the coasts and crying out with the agony of shattered waters; and now, suddenly, the thing was done; an inscrutable warm essence ran through the city streets, the smoke of chimneys and the pennons on the tall masts along the docks veered to the northeast, and out there where the pennons pointed, the foggy dregs of the gale drained away to sea, leaving the islands clear crimson in the sunset. Nondescript people on ferry-boats craned up at the sky, straightened cravats or flicked dust from their clothes without knowing why they did it and looked forward to a medley of quite ordinary evenings with an extraordinary and unaccountable excitement. Dogs, back in the Fens, tugged unnaturally at their leashes. A thin young woman, who coughed behind her hand when she was sure no one watched, stood outside the employees' exit of

the "Great White Store" on Washington Street, weighing a nickel in her palm. The nickel was car fare, or a "movie." Which? She raised her face to the soft, flaming sky. It was spring!

Down in the lower city, "Notes" was practising a pair of dance steps on the splintery planks at the end of the fish-dock. "Notes" was very young and enthusiastic, and one day, when he had time, he would write a novel—something with color in it. That is why the city editor had sent him down to T Wharf to-day. Not a vessel had stirred out since the gale closed down, and not a vessel had come in through the smother. The docks had been dead for three days. It would be good for the young chap.

Every one had gone home at this hour except "Notes" and the old lookout on the balcony of the Fish Commission; even the schooners, packed like matches in the basin, had a deserted look, for the new something in the air had sent their crews up into the city. The young fellow called up to the lookout, half in question:

"Nothing doing to-night?"

"Don't 'magine so, son." The old fellow combed his whiskers with hard fingers. "The fleet 'll be hidin' out 'nunder the Cape some'r's. Them as got fish 'll be driftin' in in the mornin', I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, I'll be running along." "Notes" lingered for one last rehearsal of the dance steps. The lookout stopped combing his whiskers.

"By Godfrey! there's a lucky fool!" He turned and bawled down the dock. "Hey there, son, might wait a second. 'Magine thet's somebody outside the island there, towin'."

"Notes" ran up the stairs, bouncing unreasonably on account of the air. Together they watched the smoke-flower of a tugboat come along the island's ridge, and behind it two slim, pink feathers, that were the after sails of a towing schooner. The two craft came along and debouched from the island's tip into the open fairway, the one dingy and active, the other luminous, unhurried, like a rosy argosy returning.

"By George!" The boy turned to the old man. "What made him try it?"

"Jest to do it—nothin' in the world but to do it. He's a devil, thet Ginny there—a plain, simple, square-rigged devil."

"By jingo! Immense!"

"Mmmm!" The ancient flicked his whiskers with a gesture of impatient scorn. "Holler, son, holler! I cal'late ye'd holler louder if ye hed an idee what them boys 've been through. Know what the bay outside there looks like? Eh? Looks like nothin'—because ye can't see it. Can't stand up; can't lay down. Decks awash an' ever'thing adrift below-decks. Scud cuttin' the riggin' to pieces. All hands hangin' on fer dear life an' prayin' to them Ginny saints o' their'n. Holler, son!"

"Notes," quite impervious to the other's

irony, leaned on the railing and watched the luminous wanderer. The towboat had veered off now, and a soiled manikin in its stern hauled in the line hand over hand, the water feathering pink at each successive jerk. The schooner, towering like a tranquil flame in the sun's death-glare, moved forward almost imperceptibly. A shadow from the high buildings beyond Atlantic Avenue came out, swallowed the hull and clambered up the masts, and she lay in the outer fringe of the basin, only the peak of her mainsail keeping the sun, a lofty, three-cornered beacon, like a flaming covenant with memory. Below that beacon was a havoc. Lines were adrift in the standing-gear; a tub, overturned in the scuppers aft, spewed out its trawl along the deck, sopping and tangled like a witch's hair. The deck amidships looked curiously lopsided, because half the dories were gone from the starboard nest; their lashings, broken at the knots, writhed on the planks.

From his height above the field of decks, "Notes" watched the crew making the vessel fast—small, far-away, tired figures, ragged, their heads all alike in shiny round oil-hats, one of them with his arm swathed and bound across his chest. "Notes" wondered how long it was since they had slept, and even as he speculated one of the tattered figures straightened up and gesticulated toward the city cliffs, where rows of lights began to twinkle in the dusk, with a

feeling of exuberance and anticipation that carried clear to him across the basin. A blue smudge trailed up from the galley stovepipe; a man stopped to spread his palms in it; and "Notes," because he was so young, could almost feel the warmth in his own palms.

"Say! Say!" He clapped the rail. "To come out of *that*"—he waved both hands wildly toward the waning cloud-wrack beyond the island—"to come out of that—into *this!* Why, man, it's a fourth act. They ought to live happy ever after, eh? Stunning!" He looked up at the sky. In the dying glow of the zenith one star appeared, so suddenly that it was like a dim explosion. "This," said "Notes," "is romance. Just plain, sheer romance." He clapped his companion between the shoulder-blades. "Well, be good. I've got to run. I want to write this thing while it's hot!"

He was half-way to the office, booming along in the tunnel, before he happened to think that he had neglected to ask the vessel's name, or her captain's. But, after all—color! He had the color, all right. Warm crimson, with a shadow of angry, hard gray behind it. And the smoke curling up from the galley stovepipe, blue and acrid.—Romance!

II

The last light drained out of the sky and a multitude of stars prickled through the masts

in the crowded basin. Down in the forecastle of the *Valerie*, Justin Jason, the "plain, simple, square-rigged devil" of the lookout's panegyric, was "mugging up," his elbows planted wide on the table, a triangle of pie in one hand and a saucer of tea in the other. He was a thick-set, swarthy fellow of forty, a sober man, with the flaring mustachio of a swashbuckler, the beginnings of a paunch under his belt, and a brace of sons, the younger of them almost half his own age.

The two were there now, fidgeting along the bench, drifting aimlessly in and out of the galley, staring out through the open square of the companionway and sniffing curiously at the air. Now and then they cast significant sidelong glances at each other and then back nervously at the silent man across the table. If he would only say something—no matter what. They had shifted to their "shore clothes," their hard collars, and hard hats; they were acutely aware that he had observed them doing it, yet he had said nothing. He continued to brood over his "mug," his brow puckered slightly.

"Aw, come on ashore, pa." "Hands," the younger, had come to the end of his endurance.

Justin Jason raised his eyes slowly. "'Shore? Yes! Yaaas! What for? Huh?"

"Aw, have some fun."

"Come on, pa." John, the elder, rubbed the point of a russet shoe with one hand, avoiding his father's eyes. "Come on, le's go up to the Swede's."

"You make me tired, the both of you!" Justin Jason glowered at the pie in one hand and the tea in the other. "This city makes me tired. Everything makes me tired—working—loafing—everything. Why, *hell*—" He slammed the saucer down, spattering, on the table, and cast the pie to the floor. "I'm tired of *eating*, I tell you!"

He got to his feet with an unnecessary violence and stood beneath the companionway, staring up at the stars and muttering. "I wonder what's ailing of me. I'm tired of eating."

"Aw, come be a sport, pa! Come on up to the Swede's."

"Shut up, the both of you!" He wheeled fiercely. "You want to go get soused and make faces at broke-down women on the street. Fun! Paah!— Cook!" He turned to a shadowy, silent figure leaning against the after side of the ladder. "Cook, I'm tired of eating. What's ailing of me?"

"The year is on the make."

He was a queer piece, this cook, an enigma in the fleet, a man without lineage or friend or birthplace—a bit of wreckage cast up on the docks. He spoke but rarely, and then with a precise diction and an inscrutable barbed quality, perhaps of derision. Justin Jason stared at him, another shade of red on his cheeks. Why could the fellow never talk straight?

"Romance! Romance!" the oracle went on

in his musing, level voice. "It is quite natural."

The skipper retreated to the bench, glowering. "Romance? What's that?"

"I know, pa." "Hands" had been a year in high school down home on the Cape. "Same's excitement—Romance is."

John thrust in with a bawl of derision, deep like his father's. "Aw, you gimme a pain. You don't know what you're talking about. Romance is a movin' pitcher, ain't it, cook?"

"Well—not exactly."

For the first time since this inexplicable fellow had joined the *Valerie*, Justin Jason had heard him hesitate.

"What is it, then?" he demanded, with a new-found dominance. "Sing out!"

"Well, it's hard to— Well, listen!" The man edged forward, so that the light picked out his flabby face, livid from long stewing in galley steam. He indicated the boys with a quick gesture. "Their mother—"

"Dead, ten year," the master snapped him off.

"Yes—yes—but when you were courting her."

"Oh! Same's fighting a lot of fellows. I see."

"Naw, naw, pa." "Hands" wagged an impatient head. "It's same's going round a lot—seeing life—colored lights and dance tunes and—"

The vocal burden passed mysteriously across the forecastle, and now it was the shadow behind

the ladder that spoke, quietly, as though to himself.

"—Dance tunes, yes. And women in soft gowns dancing to them. You can see them passing this way and that and hear their voices through green fronds. Or a cab through the Park, or through a crowded street, bumping just a little when you come to the car-tracks. Or a fire in the grate when you come home. Or clean, new money counted right and pushed out through the wicket. Or the Head coming into the cage with his hand stretched out—and nothing the matter with your books. Nothing the matter with your books."

There was silence again. When it had endured perhaps a minute Justin Jason rose nervously, climbed the ladder, and stood on deck. Far off through the lofty grottoes of the city an Elevated train sang on a curve. The slow, warm, choking wind came out of those cañons, bearing a whisper of beaten pavements, and a confused and multitudinous murmur of voices, and a memory of green things breaking ground far away in the Fens. Justin Jason turned to his two sons, who had followed him up, watchfully discreet.

"Well—there's only one thing I want you to remember," he said. "These fish starts going onto the dock at five sharp, and I don't want no dead ones round this vessel, or they'll get what's coming to 'em good and plenty."

He leaned on the rail and watched them go, crawling, swinging, leaping, diminishing across the huddled decks toward the dock. After that he stepped to the companion and called down.

"Cook! Was that you was talking about same's a traveling-man? A man like that sees a lot of life. One was telling me once. Eh?"

Then, receiving no answer, he turned aft with a sudden determination, descended the ladder to his state-room, opened the locker where his own "shore kit" lay, and took down from the shelf above it the blue razor-box and the soap and brush.

III

A fine lifting wind came off the Adriatic and ruffled the beaches where the naked children splashed, shining like angels of pearl under the sun. A dozen old men sat on the foreshore above, their capes fallen from their shoulders and their hats cast carelessly at their feet, for the "First Green" was stirring that far-off land. One of the old men recounted an episode in lively pantomime—a blood-warming episode—he had been young once. His toothless gums flickered when he laughed. Above these again, where the village dwellings filed along the cobbled street, young women paced singly or in pairs, rallying one another in graphic gesture, because they were not able to keep their eyes ashore. And out there on the lagoon the fishing-boats rode in a gorgeous

black-and-white cluster, draped to the peaks with nets, for all the world like merchants from the Orient with their goods over their shoulders. And there, too, came the young men, wading through the shallows, deep-colored, finely muscled, the curves on their wet legs catching up white flares from the water. One of them turned and faced the thin girl who coughed behind her hand when no one watched. His brown chest was open to the air; he smiled, his teeth incredibly white under the black shot of his mustache; he tossed his curls back with an exuberant splendor and held aloft a great, shimmering fish. "Come," he seemed to cry, though no words came out of his moving lips. "Come out of the ends of the blowing Spring. Come and eat this fish with me. We will put brown in your cheeks, coughing girl, and gladness in your feet. Come!"

And then the whole vision was gone, swallowed in the arbitrary night of the "Photoplayhouse"; the girl's eyes were wet, and her hands, stretched out impulsively, found only a varnished seat-back. She fell to coughing once more in the rank air, so violently that more than one shadowy, impatient head turned in her direction. But she did not care. On the seat-back before her was a contrivance of metal with two slots in its upper side, one marked "Bonbons" and the other "Caramels." Almost unconsciously her fingers strayed to the bottom of the box and

jiggled it slightly. Once upon a time she had done this accidentally and the thing had flown open with an ecstatic pop. She liked to think that one day there would be another. She always held her breath a little at the test.

Her hands dropped in her lap and she began to weep without any sound. She was not thinking about anything in the world, not even of the fact that there was no logical reason for her weeping. She ought to go home. The "Evacuation Day Parade" was announced on the screen. She had seen the parade and the picture. Her neighbor on the right began to fidget and glanced covertly at her.

"What's the matter?" he whispered, after a moment of indecision.

She had lived in the city long enough to know that she must not answer his question. This had been impressed upon her a great many times.

"Nothing," she murmured. She remembered, with a curious lack of dismay, that this was just what "they" were always looking for—an "opening." Any exchange of words, beyond a reference to the police, constituted an "opening." But somehow, to-night, she could not seem to care. She even speculated, with a queer stoppage in her breath, as to what his next move was to be. She could not make much of him in the dim light, beyond a general tendency toward stoutness, a pointed mustache, and his hair

brushed up in a slick swirl over one temple. A typical, low-caste "masher," at any rate.

He appeared ill at ease. He folded his arms and immediately unfolded them to beat a tattoo on the seat with his finger-tips. He peered down at her, and then, as though to cover his indiscretion, hunched about ponderously to cross one knee over the other. She was aware of a hand groping in front of her, and a click of metal touching metal.

"D'you know how to work this?" he whispered in her ear.

She took the nickel from his fingers, slipped it in the slot marked "Caramels," turned the explosive disk, and held the carton out to him.

"Here," she murmured, jogging his hand a little when he did not take it. She looked up and found his eyes intent upon the screen, where a brass band rolled forward with mute gesticulations and vanished out of the bottom of the picture.

"Looky 't them gentlemen in cabs," the man soliloquized, under his breath. "Them's same's cabs, ain't they?"

"Here—here's your candy."

He pushed the carton off with an impatient palm. "Don't like candy," he muttered. "Go on, eat it, miss. I'm sick of candy."

The rejected carton dropped in her lap. She sat up a little more stiffly and stared at the head of the frowsy woman in front, and the feather of

color that always lay along her cheek-bones spread out to cover her temples. When she had first appeared at the Great White Store, a blond floor-walker had slipped a box of chocolates under the ribbons on her counter, and she had thrown it on the floor ostentatiously, because the whispering women had told her why he put it there. That was before she had taken to coughing. Of a sudden, a bitter and unreasoning rancor at those whisperers swept over her. The frowsy head in front waved and shattered in the rush of her hot tears. Oh, why *did* she have to know? Her rebellious fingers ran over the smooth surface of the carton. It was not that there was candy in it—poor, tasteless stuff at best; no, it was something quite apart from that.

She heard the man's voice, subdued and rambling.

"Must be sport riding in a cab like that. Looky 't the cushions in the cockpit there—bet they're soft's anything." He began putting questions, presumably as a matter of strategy to follow the "opening." Her mind was dull and acquiescent, and his queries ran in with a stream of interrogation reaching back to the ends of her memory: "Is this real satin? Was this honestly forty cents before the sale? Will this match in daylight?" . . . "D'you think they like it bumpin' over the car-tracks—ever rid in a cab same's that, eh?"—

"I—I feel very fai-n—t—"

She realized dimly that her own lips had moved to the last. As dimly she was aware of something pinching her right arm roughly and of being miraculously in the aisle. The light marking an exit advanced upon her like a gory moon.

Once outside, where the arc-lights made a narrow day, Justin Jason allowed his burden to droop on the ledge of a convenient shop-window, took off his derby, mopped his head all over with a red handkerchief, and swore distractedly under his breath. A small boy, crying the evening papers, came around a corner and stopped short with half a head-line still in his mouth and his eyes fixed upon the limp figure. He gestured feverishly to another boy across the alley, and then, as though cleared of duty, fell into a more permanent attitude.

"Wife sick, mister?"

Justin Jason glared at the boy and mopped the back of his neck. He became aware of an increasing murmur behind his back and a shuffling of many feet. Some one was telling some one else in a high whisper that the gentleman's wife had fainted, and from the corner of his right eye he observed a small, spare man with side-whiskers jabbing a thumb up the street and repeating, "Drug-store—drug-store"—like some obscure incantation. Several people thought of the word "doctor" at the same moment; one or two of the word "physician."

"You make me tired," Justin Jason mumbled in his throat, "the hull of you." His spine tingled with the burden of all those curious eyes. He stared down heavily at the tip of one shoe, then up at the gilded legend over the shop-window. "Wish t' God I was aboard!"

The girl had roused a little. He became aware of her eyes fixed upon him, glinting unnaturally in the hard light like some bluish metal; but he avoided them by finding a milliner's sign still higher on the building. A hand touched his elbow. He shook it off roughly, muttering, "Sheer off there!"

"None of that, my friend!" The officer's grip tightened. "You're blocking the street."

"Oh!" Justin Jason looked around at the blue fellow with an uneasy humility. He possessed a certain awe of the city police, as of something which touched him but distantly. His gaze traveled back to the shoe-tip, sullen and nervous.

"Well—what's the matter? Wife get faint in the pi'tures? Say! Speak up there!"

"Ummm!"

"Look here, man!" The officer jogged his elbow impatiently. "Come out of it. *Do* something! Get a cab and take 'er home. . . . Hey! Taxi!" He raised his free arm and beckoned across the throng. "Over here, taxi. . . . Out of the way there! Let him through! Get off the curb there. . . . Here, lady, up with

you—just a step. Help on the other side there, mister. That's the eye! In you go! What's the address? Speak up. . . . Oh, well, never mind, then. Driver, get 'em out of here. Stand back there. Stand *back!* You guys *deef?*"

IV

Justin Jason sat bolt upright in the purring gloom, staring through the glass at the driver's back. He had a feeling that the man was going ahead too fast through the crowded street. A dray laden with beer-kegs shot out of nowhere and towered close ahead; he felt himself shunted over the smooth, humpy cushion; the dray was no more; his finger-nails relaxed in his palms; he had not uttered a sound.

For the moment he had almost forgotten the girl. He turned his head covertly and found her lying back in the other corner, a shadowy presence hardly visible save for the gray oval of her face, out of which her eyes were watching him, unnaturally large and intent.

His discomfort increased. He resumed his stiff contemplation of the driver's back, but still he could not shake off those watching eyes, so motionless and vigilant and queer. What was wrong with the woman, anyhow?

He muttered aloud, "What's the matter?" She did not answer.

The cab edged out of the traffic and halted in

an open space beside a church, and the driver, getting down, came to open the door on the man's side.

"Well, now, where to?"

Where to? Justin Jason had not thought of that. He fingered his chin and scowled and temporized: "Well—well—" But at that the girl's weight came against his shoulder and he had a side vision of her white face peering out at the man.

"Hemlock Street! Two-ten Hemlock Street!" There was a tight breathlessness about it that spoke of panic.

The door clicked shut and the motor bucked and hammered with the trouble of starting. Justin Jason was conscious of the weight withdrawn gradually from his shoulder. He glanced around, but even that faint loom of her face was invisible now, blotted out by her arms. She was crumpled down in a little heap of woe in the corner, weeping, not silently this time, but with the wild revulsion of a child kept home at the last moment from a long-promised party. The man groped and found her shoulder and shook it.

"For God's sake!" he burst out. "For God's sake, what's ailing of you?"

A pencil of light found its way along the wall and picked out her face, thrust out at him, wet and rebellious.

"What's ailing me? My father and mother,

and their fathers and mothers, and theirs. Did you ever see another night like this? Tell me!"

He peered down at her with an uneasy feeling that she was somehow not "just right." "Mmmm," he floundered. "Fair weather t'-night."

She caught him up: "Fair weather!" She leaned closer and plucked his sleeve. "*Fair weather!* And I'm going home to Mrs. Dorgan's boarding-house! Did you ever live in a boarding-house? Tell me, did you ever live in a boarding-house?"

"No—no—that is I knew a man once that did. Had some high times there—that's what he told me."

"Yes—yes. High times!"

She turned away to look out of the open window. A procession of trees was passing on that side, and beyond, in an open space, a light reflected in a pool of water, thin and shattery, and beyond that again the down-town mesa gave off its pale exhalations to the sky. Against this faintly luminous mat the man could see the silhouette of her profile, immobile, almost lethargic.

She had not answered his question, and after a little while he forgot about it himself. Her languor communicated itself to him, his shoulders sank back against the yielding cushions, and he crossed one foot over the other.

"This is sport," he thought to himself. "Say,

this is a lot of sport," his lips repeated, with an anxious emphasis. He had lost a good deal of time. He sank a little further into the cushions, flung an elbow over the sill of the window at his side, and began to look about. A ribbon of light drifted past, flicking interminable foot-passengers into limbo, along with a hand-organ couple and a fugitive newsboy who fluttered a blur at him. And then there came an abrupt glare, a screeching of car-brakes, a motorman's angry wail, and the cushions jounced and squeaked slightly as the tires beneath them threw the car-tracks away.

"Like that, eh?"

The girl did not appear to hear. He returned to his own outlook, shifted his feet, muttered with studied enthusiasm, "Say now, this is something *like*," and was in the act of rummaging his pockets for a possible cigar when his attention was taken by an illuminated disk staring at him through the forward pane. He regarded it with increasing wonder as a numeral in a tiny oblong window snapped out of sight and was replaced immediately by another.

"Now *that's* a piece o' gear," he puzzled. He nudged the young woman's elbow and indicated the affair with a thumb.

"What's it for?" he questioned.

"What? Oh, the meter!" She studied him for a moment, half suspicious, half amused. "That's what tells you how much you have to pay."

"Oh! Hmmm! I see!"

The thing fascinated him with its hard, shiny face. He shrugged his shoulders and gazed out of the window with an attempt at luxuriousness, but for all he could do his eyes would sneak back, and there the numeral had changed again, mysteriously. He was not a stingy man, this Justin Jason; on the contrary, he had never cared enough about money, as such, to get very far ahead. But this was another thing—this inhuman and inexorable business of addition. And then, there was no telling when it would end. If only he had some idea where this street of hers was. . . . He leaned out of the window, moved by a vague impulse, but ahead of him the twin thread of the street lamps ran straight away and converged into one luminous point. His hand slipped cautiously into a trousers pocket. There was some small change there, and three bills, ten-dollar bills, he remembered. He cast a quick glance at his companion, made sure she was not looking, and transferred one of the bills to the opposite pocket.

"There," he breathed. "Can't be more 'n that, anyhow."

He had a sense of relief at this definite setting of a limit, and of mild triumph, feeling that he had somehow outmaneuvered the shiny contraption. He had lost more time, though. He settled his elbow on the sill once more and fingered the tips of his mustache.

"This is all right, ain't it?" he spoke across to the girl.

She opened her lips and then closed them without a sound. A frightened look came into her face and she jerked about to study the passing fronts.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!"

The man felt her hand fluttering on his wrist.

"Stop him—please! Right away!"

"Wha— What for?"

"Quick! Oh, *why* didn't I think!"

"What's the matter?" he gasped, thoroughly bewildered. "Here! Here!"

The girl's knuckles were pounding wildly on the front glass. The driver made no sign, but the machine swerved abruptly toward the curb and came to a halt. The man twisted round to speak through the window.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"We'll get out at the corner. You needn't go into—wait—we'll get out here. It's only a step."

She swung open the door and stepped out unsteadily, casting anxious eyes this way and that along the sidewalk. What if she hadn't thought? What if she *had* actually driven up to Mrs. Dorgan's boarding-house in a taxi, with a man? Supposing Mrs. Dorgan had seen—or any of the Dorgan inmates, for that matter,—the nasty, respectable little Dorgan inmates such as she herself. She might have been put out. She

had known girls . . . A sudden wave of self-hatred swept over her. She was so puny with her anxious calculations in this lusty, wide-flung night, so contemptible, like an infinitesimal renegade in the train of spring. A slight dizziness followed her fright; she sank against a lamp-post and coughed and giggled.

Justin Jason, busy with the cabman, glanced about uneasily. He took off his hat, fanned his face, and counted the bills that the man laid in his palm.

"*And* thirty cents," he prompted. "The log there stands one-seventy."

The fellow stared down at him with an expression of faint surprise.

"I 'ain't got any silver to-night."

"Well—what we going to do, I wonder?"

Justin Jason shuffled his feet and cast another worried glance at his companion.

The cabman slammed the door shut, rattled a small lever abstractedly, and looked up at the sky.

"Some other time," he suggested.

"That's right—some other time." Justin Jason took out the red handkerchief, mopped his face, and watched the glossy vehicle move off, with a sense of relief, and, at the same moment, of depression and regret. He had missed most of it. He had not been able to give this thing of the cook's a fair trial. "Some other time," perhaps. He turned.

"Which way now?" he asked.

"You've been awful good," she evaded. "You don't know how good. Please don't bother to come any farther. It's just a step, and I—I can—"

He broke in with a deprecatory explosion.

"Bother! Well, guess it won't tire me too much!" He was amazed to hear himself guffawing. Somehow, without any particular effort on his part, affairs had come suddenly into hand. He squared his shoulders, twisted his mustache, and when the girl faltered, "but—but listen—" he swept her hesitation out of the way with a splendid gesture.

"But *nothing!* Come along!"

It was exactly so that the big bronzed fellow had looked at her out of the Photoplayhouse screen. The discovery made her gulp a little, and something turned over somewhere inside of her, something that had always been wrong. She could not speak just then, but indicated the direction by a nod, slipped her hand into the crook of his arm, and smiled up at him.

Justin Jason carried his arm with a careful rigidity. He was not accustomed to walking in this fashion; it appealed to him as rather idiotic, and at the same time curiously pleasurable—even more pleasurable when the fingers on his biceps tightened with an excess of nervousness.

"Do you remember that picture with the boats in it?" There was a flutter in the girl's

voice. "And the fish? I was just—just wondering — Please would you mind telling me what you do? your—your life?"

He felt his face flaming. He walked on without answering, his eyes doggedly ahead, pretending he had not heard. Perhaps she would not ask again. At her gentle urge on his elbow he rounded a corner where a delicatessen shop threw fans of light across the sidewalk, and came into a deserted, high-walled street, the houses in it all alike, a crumpled newspaper, tumbling over and over in a gutter, the only object stirring in its arid length.

Not far from the corner a ground-floor window was half open, on account of the new weather, and a man was singing inside. The song was an extremely popular one, the accompanying piano wanted tuning badly, but the singer did not appear to mind these details so long as the stream of creation went forward unfailing.

Justin Jason halted, glad of the diversion, for he was still fearful of the repeated question.

"That's nice, ain't it?" he mused. He stopped and peered into the room, squinting through the leaves of a rubber-plant in the window with an unabashed curiosity. He could get little more than a general impression of what was going on, a kind of colored mosaic of festivity.

The singing man broke off and there followed the screech of a piano-stool as he swung round.

"You play that 'Hurly-Burly,' Miss Jenkins,

and I'll show you a new step, something I saw them doing down at Prince Hall last night. It's a marvel. . . . Say! Where's the fudge gone? Who swiped the fudge?"

A chorus of female voices came tumbling out of the window, excited and protesting; one higher and shallower than the rest obtruded.

"Mr. Rosenfuhg's got it behind him on the sofa there. I saw him."

The colored mosaic shifted pattern and there came out the lively, good-humored tumult of a scuffle, and then some one shuffled on carpet to a chattery melody.

"Dancing, eh? Say!" Justin Jason looked down at his companion and jerked a thumb toward the rubber-plant. "Say, is that there a frond?"

The girl laughed happily, as though he had made a great joke, and held his arm tighter. "Why?" she whispered.

"Oh, I dunno."

He edged forward, encroaching upon the grass-plot in his excitement. Here, beyond a doubt, was the thing of which the cook had spoken. "Say!" he breathed, with a furtive enthusiasm. "Be sport to go in there."

She laughed again, this time not so happily.

"But you haven't told me," she reverted, shaking his arm with a gentle insistence. He had a side-vision of her face, held up to him with a light on it of a desperate revolt. "You

must be *something*. Oh, I don't know what makes me so silly—but the way you look—and act—"

His eyes traveled along the barren thoroughfare, with its dusty, diminishing lamps and its lone newspaper tumbling in the gutter, and returned again to the window, an inconceivable, voluptuous garden hanging in a desert. And this time, instead of writhing at her question, he smiled.

"Guess," he said.

"Oh, I—I couldn't—"

"Go on and guess," he commanded her.

"Well—you— Oh, you live somewhere *else*. Not here—no, some other wonderful place. You see other people and other things—and—and you take your life in your hands—because there is *danger*."

Her eyes, shining in the checkered light, were begging close to his. He smiled, showing his white teeth, for now he was on the very threshold of the cook's enchantment.

"Yes," he said.

"You go and come," she went on. "Your feet are free. Women—women are crazy about you—"

Her fingers pulled at the cloth of his sleeve and he would have marked a sudden heaviness in her voice at the last, had his brain not been reeling a little with the subtle wine of adventure.

"Yes," he nodded.

"And you— Oh, *tell* me!"

"Well—aw, nothing—I'm nothing but a traveling-man," he lied without sin, for Carnival was abroad to-night. He did not look at her; he threw off his information in a casual tone—a paltry matter; he feigned an interest in the rubber-plant which, for the moment, he did not see. When she spoke, he tasted the sweet flattery of her unbelief.

"You—you *are!*"

He looked around quickly, for her hand had left his arm, and found her half-way up the steps of the house.

"We going in *there?* Say!" It was now his turn for incredulity.

"I live here." She seemed to have trouble with her breathing. "I—I— You've been awful kind. I wish you knew how— Good night!"

She was gone so suddenly behind the storm-door that he had not moved. He turned dully to the window once more and heard the small tumult of her arrival within. The young man who had sung cried, "Hullo, tardy!" and moved across the bright pattern, his purple cravat skipping from chink to chink. "Mrs. Dorgan! Oh, Mrs. Dorgan! Anything left from supper? Oh, just this once. Be a sport. . . . Maude, eat a piece of fudge to Poverty. I'm fired. Yep. That fool of an editor couldn't get it through his wooden dome—couldn't see the color of the thing. Oh, marvelous color and movement

and a background of storm. Immense, Maude, immense! Well, here's to Grub Street! Say, where you been, girl? You're as white as a pillow-case. Fagged out?"

The fellow's patter streamed out of the window, bustled vacantly about the watcher's ear-drums, and dissipated itself in the long street.

"I bet she's got a case on him," the man mumbled heavily.

By and by a policeman appeared in the vista, twirling his night-stick lazily. Observing his approach, Justin Jason stepped from the grass and moved along the walk in the direction of the delicatessen shop. The tumbling newspaper kept him company for a passing instant, then, outpaced, gave up and leaned against a brick. Coming on behind, the officer paused to listen to a fresh burst of melody emerging from the fifth window from the corner, holding his night-stick poised in the air, not unlike a flaming sword.

V

The cook stirred slightly and stretched his legs, which were cramped from sitting long on the schooner's afterhouse.

"They're beginning to put out the lights," he mused. "Not all of them, of course. They leave enough in the streets so honest men can go home to their fathers' houses. And that's a joke on them—because that is exactly Romance—and

they don't know it. Romance—to have a light street safer than a dark street."

He got up suddenly and moved forward along the outer rail with a habitual noiselessness. From the shadow of the foremast he watched a somber figure draw in across the cluttered vessels, hoist laboriously to the after deck, stand for a long time brooding over the dark and empty harbor, then disappear down the after companionway.

"I wonder if he found it," the cook put to the sky. The infinitesimal light of the stars falling on his face discovered a sort of haggard mirth.

"Of course he didn't find it. He might—*to-morrow* or *yesterday*. It's not here, you know; it's over there—where the other fellow is."

THE END

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